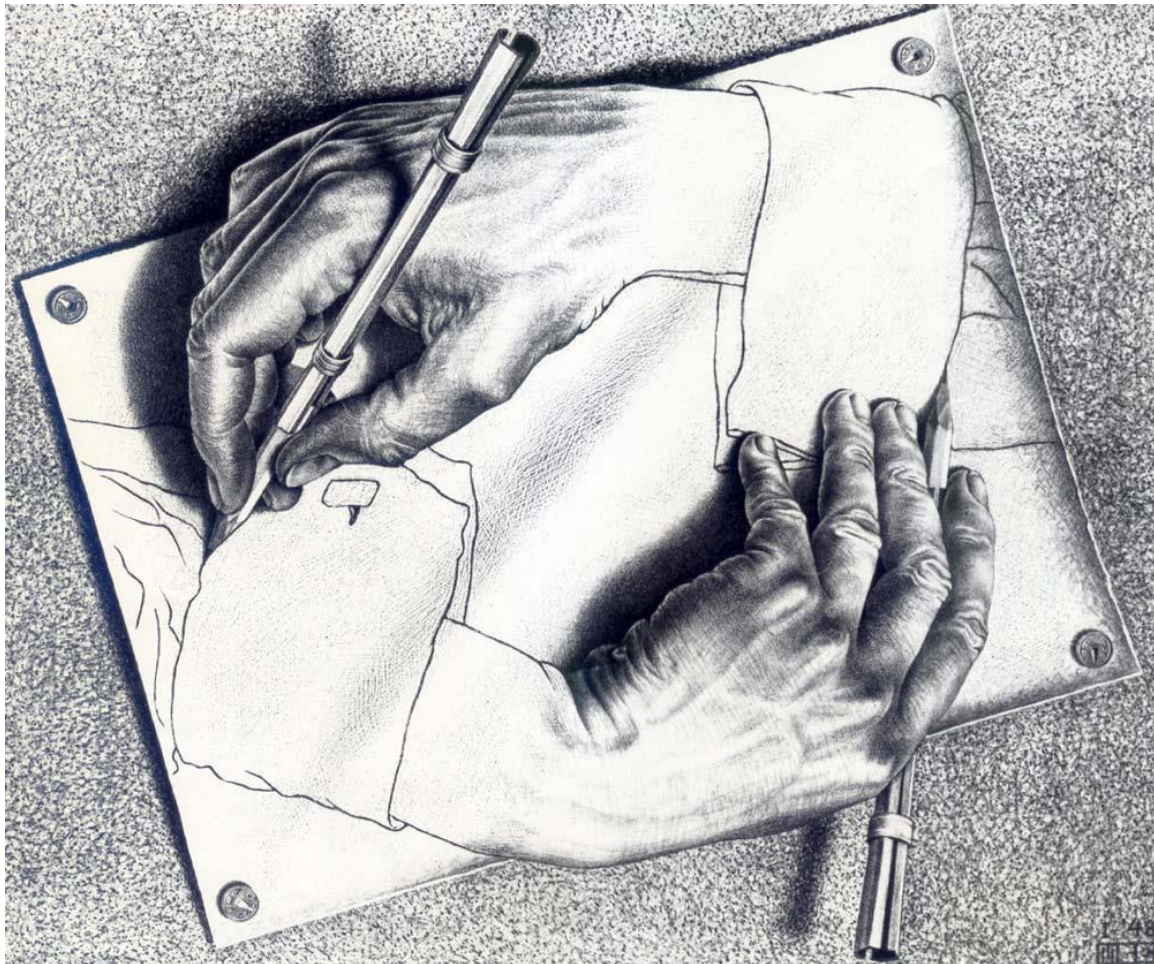


# *Pen & Pencil Magazine*



**Volume Eight: Spring 2022**

## **Volume Eight: Pen & Pencil Magazine**

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Obelisk Press

Vancouver, BC, Canada

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If you have a submission for the **Pen & Pencil Magazine** feel free to contact the Editor in Chief at

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## ***The True Victims of War***



The children of medical workers warm themselves in a blanket as they wait for their relatives in a hospital in Mariupol, Ukraine, March 4. (Evgeniy Maloletka/AP)

## Pen & Pencil Welcomes Submissions

Obelisk Press of Vancouver is delighted to publish the Eighth edition of *Pen & Pencil Magazine* which serves to feature the work of aspiring writers. *Pen & Pencil Magazine* welcomes submissions on a quarterly basis.

This edition of the magazine has new pieces by Olivia, Aki, Rose, Isabella and William. Several articles come from the archives of the now defunct magazine *This Great Society* and from other contemporary archives. Thank you also goes to Michelle, Olivia and Aki for art submissions.

The *Pen & Pencil Magazine* board is comprised of the unpaid volunteers: Please feel free to send your short story, prose, poetry and artwork submissions to the Editor in Chief at

pbruskiewich @ gmail.com.

There is no fee to submit. There is no writer's fee provided by the journal for those who submit.

The publishing rights remain with the writer.

## Short Stories



## ***In Praise of St. Sebastian by Rose Lang***

[**Paris**] When you are a student at a Catholic all girl's school learning about love and the facts of life is rather interesting. You have to approach this subject in a very circumscriptive way.

Our school was gated and had a large courtyard at the centre of which there was a nice flower garden that was tended by the novitiate nuns, not much older than we were. Each year some students from the school would decide to give their lives and their loves to God. These students were given a bed in the wing of the school that housed the nuns and upon their graduation from the school would become novitiates. Most of these classmates came from poor families.

The rest of my schoolmates were in a rush to leave the school at the end of the day to flood into Paris and enjoy a brief period of freedom as they made their ways home. *Je n'étais pas si chanceuse ...*

For me, life had few freedoms outside of my school, or my home. Both my parents worked long hours. I did not have *une nounou*, I had my grandmere, who each morning would walk me to school and each afternoon when the end of day bell rang would be there to walk me home again. She lived around the corner from me. I would spend the afternoons with her doing my homework and even had dinner with her sometimes and then stay over when my parents did not want me *sous leur pieds*.

When I was fourteen I discovered that I was no longer a little girl but I was becoming *une jeune femme* as my grandmere would say. Just when we needed to be taught something about ... you know what ... the nuns kept us busy doing silly school work conjugating verbs and doing art projects which mostly were drawing and painting watercolors of the flowers in our school garden.

One morning a gardener came and this caused a stir he being a young and handsome young man in his twenties. He was studying horticulture or agriculture or something like this *à son college* and was doing a practicum in our garden. He looked a lot like Pierre Perrier the French actor.

That morning was sunny and hot and so at some point he decided to take off his shirt ... where within perhaps a minute *la mère supérieure* was there to ask him to put his shirt back on.

I happened to be looking out the window when he took off his shirt and he happened to look up at me staring down at him at the second floor window. I suspect I was not only girl thinking this ... but I wondered who he was and whether he would be a fixture in our little garden. He was there several days toiling with some rock work that needed repair. The garden was as old as the school and our school was well over a hundred years old.

It was strange, but the first time I saw him I imagined him as the central sculpture in our little garden ... like Michelangelo's David. There had once was a little sculpture at the centre of the garden but it went missing once, a prank that one of the girls wanted to play on *la mère supérieure* of the day.

Le petit cerf appeared one morning on her desk within her locked office. How it got in the locked office and who put it there remains a mystery to this day. *La mère supérieure* had not taken it well and so the little pedestal at the centre of the garden stood empty. Rumor had it she had le petit cerf set as a head stone for a poor unfortunate school girl who had died of some mysterious malady. She may have been pregnant ... so the rumors were.

Yes, it is difficult to learn about love and the facts of life at our school, even though by age fourteen we should be told this for obvious reasons.

One afternoon my grandmere could not pick me up from school so I had to walk to her place all by myself. I had my own key to her apartment for emergencies. She wasn't expected home until after 6 and so I decided to take my time walked to her apartment.

As it happened, that same afternoon the young and handsome gardener happen to be leaving our school at the same time and so some of my girlfriends and I decided to walk behind him to see where he might be heading. I think he sort of knew we were there following him and it appeared he did not mind. He actually glanced back at the three of us at one point and smiled.

I think he recognized me and I could feel the smile touch me individually. I started to blush. My two friends noticed this and asked me what was happening. I turned to them and boldly said "... I am getting wet ... you know where!"

*Mon dieu* the giggle carried well over to the gardener who suddenly turned and started to walk towards us with determination. My two friends disappeared in a blink of an eye, leaving me alone to meet him face a face.

“I recognize you,” he said. “You were looking out the second floor window when I took my shirt off the other day.”

I nodded.

“Are you following me?”

I shook my head.

“Where did you two friend go?”

I shrug my shoulders and looked around.

“You’re not much of a talker are you?”

I shook my head and then spoke. “My grandmere told me never to talk to strangers.”

“But I am not a stranger ...” he responded.

I stuttered as I said “I guess not” and could feel my face become more flushed.

Before I knew it he had tugged my sketchbook from my bag and started to look at my artwork. “You like flowers ...”

“That’s what les soeurs ask us to draw ... *les fleurs* ...”

A piece of paper fell from my sketchbook. Before I could grab it back he had it in his hand.

“What’s this?”

I had started to draw a sketch of a man tending a garden. He was without a shirt. It was obviously him.

“Is this me? The shape of my torso is all wrong. You have drawn me in the shape of a woman.” He was right. I had tried drawing myself in a mirror from time to time but I had never tried drawing a man.

“Do you like drawing people?”

I nodded slowly.

A broad smile crossed his face. “Have you ever drawn with a live model?”

I looked down at my feet. I was too scared to look up into his eyes. “No ...”

“Would you like to?”

My heart skipped a beat. “Yes ...”

“Tomorrow is my last day working on your garden so today is your only chance.” My eyes shot up meeting his. His eyes gleamed with happiness,

“Come ... my place is just around the corner.” He started to walk up the street not looking back. Perhaps he was very sure of himself, and knew that I would follow him. Or perhaps he dared not look back if by chance I got cold feet and ran off.

I followed him. I don’t know why I did this, but I did. I looked at my watch. It was barely four.

His place was an old pied-à-terre. It had simple but comfortable furniture and he had a cat which ran to meet him at the door when he stepped in his place. When I stepped into his place his cat was stand-offish with me.

“Make yourself comfortable. Would you like some wine?”

“No ... l’eau minérale.” He brought me a bottle and opened it for me and poured some into a glass and handed it to me before he took a drink directly out of the bottle. Then he said “you know I don’t even know your name.”

“Rose ...”

“Sebastian ...” He offered me his hand.

I lifted mine thinking he would merely shake my hand, but he took my hand in his than bowed politely and kissed the back of my hand. “...like the Saint.” He smiled. “Make yourself comfortable while I take a quick shower.”

Then he left me all alone. I looked down at my hand where he kissed me and felt a flood of happiness. Then I looked around his small world. There was second hand furniture and many paperback books. I stood up and walked over to his bookshelf. It was built into the wall and was entirely filled with books.

I randomly read the title of one. Satre. Another ... Poincaré. A third ... Thomas Aquinas. His library was very intellectual.

I walked over to his desk which stood beneath a window. The sunlight set a glow across the notebook open on the desk top. He was composing a love poem. Ahh, I thought, a romantic.

Time must have stood still while I visited his small world for he suddenly reappeared wrapped in a towel around his waist. He was still wet and was drying his hair with a second towel. He let the towel drop from his hand then walked over to the corner of the entrance to this room, turned around and then leaned back against the wall. He kicked the other towel off himself and lifted his arms above his head. “Draw me like Saint Sebastian.”

The view of him, naked before me took my breath away. My hands shook as I took a pencil from my bag and began to draw him. He was more beautiful than I had imagine. His masculinity came alive before my very eyes.

As I drew him it was so quiet I could hear his breathing from clear across the room. I wondered if he could hear my heart, for it was beating wildly. I drew for perhaps a half hour. Then without a word I grabbed my things raced to the door and was out into the street without looking back. Perhaps it was because I was getting wet and bothered and could not trust myself to be in a room alone with a naked man ...

I managed to arrive at my grandmere's apartment a mere three minutes before she did. I was hot and bothered. When she asked me what I had done all afternoon ... I told her I had a headache and had taken a nap.

The following day there he was in the garden again and I found inside of me enough courage to go and speak with him. Quietly he asked me why I had run off? I tried to explain without really telling the truth. "I had to be somewhere by six." In actual fact I could not trust myself to be there with him.

"Can I see you again?" I looked up into his eyes. They sparkled with happiness. I slowly nodded. Sebastian and I are now good friends.

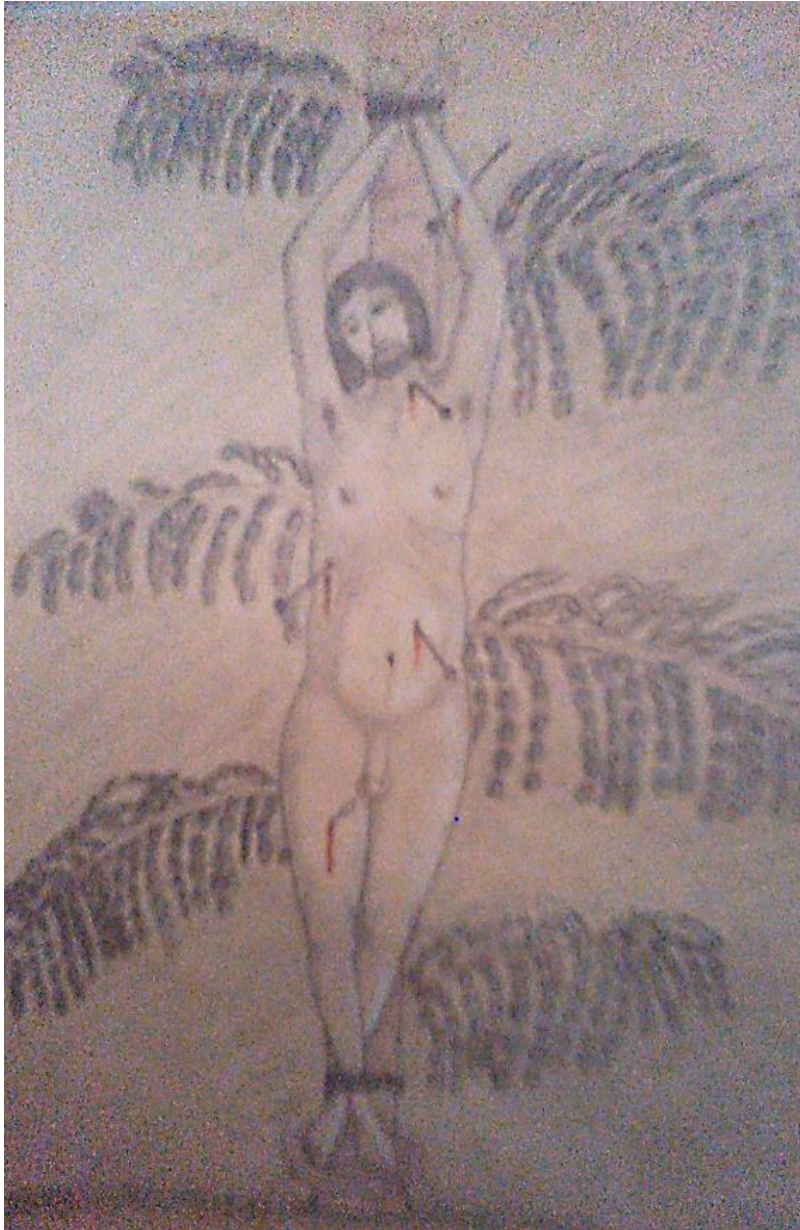


He has let me draw him many times, *sans habillement* but not once did he ask for liberties from me. Sebastian has been a perfect gentleman. I have never asked him ... mais, je me demande s'il est gay.

As for me, I now understand love and the facts of life much better, and I think I have even met a Saint.

I gave my drawing of St. Sebastian to a friend who lives in Vancouver as a birthday gift years ago. All I have left to remember this first encounter with Sebastian is it is a polaroid picture of the drawing.

Not bad for a fourteen year old artist, don't you think?



## ***A Long Hot Summer Evening by Patrick Bruskiewich***

It was a long hot summer evening. That evening I should have known better than to put myself into such a vulnerable position. But until that evening nothing like this had ever happened to me. I didn't think that such a terrible thing could ever happen to me. After all, I am a man.

But men do sometimes get violated by women ... and well ... being sexually accosted by a woman does leave its own unique scars. Those scars are different than what a woman might feel after being violated by a man. The scars are just as real and they may never go away.

But like I said I should have known better.

For a few years I had been a model for some artists around Vancouver. Usually I would sit for them for a few hours in-studio as they drew, painted or sculpted figurative art. The first time I did this was when I was asked to sit by a woman friend when I was at university. I had tagged along with her one day at lunch time thinking we would both be doing some life drawing at a drop in studio on campus but when the model failed to show up she out and out volunteered me to sit for her artist friends and I could very well not say no! But that day, having been 'volunteered' I said I did not want to sit alone so both she and I sat that first afternoon. This whole first experience was a very pleasant one. In fact it was an amazing experience that flooded my body in endorphins. I guess I should tell you that when I was in my twenties I did a number on my neck and spine and have lived for many years in chronic pain.

Anything that will lessen my chronic pain I much appreciate. This is one of the reasons why even today, many years later, I enjoy sitting as an artist model; that and the fact that I am an artist in my own right and feel an obligation to help other artists out.

It seems there few good male artist models and that women artists enjoy exploring the dichotomy of the human condition. Understand one thing right off the bat. I am heterosexual and truly enjoy the company of women. Not all women mind you; just kind hearted women.

When I sat sometimes the artist and I would be all alone and sometimes there would be a room full of artists. One spring an artist friend of mine, a sculptor, asked me to sit for a birthday party, which I did one Saturday evening in her studio as one of her friend was turning thirty. They did a lovely sculpture of me in the style of Michelangelo's David. The loin cloth stayed on for much of the three hours, only coming off for the last half hour when we were all a bit tipsy on wine and when they needed to complete the sculpture. It wasn't as if they had not seen David in his splendor before ...

Sitting as an artist model at a special event like a birthday party seemed more enjoyable than sitting for just art. It was another occasion when my body was flooded with endorphins. Being an artist model at a special event like a birthday party was more enjoyable because at a special event you become a sort of living sculpture and a bit of a 'plaything' for the person the event is for.

There are, of course, limits to the amount of artistic playing. I drew the line at touching or anything overtly sexual. Teasing was fine but touching was not permitted; that and any sexual favors that might be asked. Being Catholic and all I knew the difference between love and lust. I did not mind being loved for being a beautiful artist model, but I did mind any grabbing or lusting. My first evening as a birthday gift left me with such a heartfelt feeling that I wrote a lovely story about this a few years ago which has been published.

A few weeks later one of the friends of one of the women from that birthday bash invited me to sit in for a bachelorette party she was having for one of her friends and well ... I agreed, with the proviso that I would, once again, wear a loin cloth. In hind sight I should have done a bit of checking before I arrived in a strange place to be surrounded by strangers. But everything turned out fine this time out. The women enjoyed the evening, as I did too. Once I felt comfortable I did let the bride to be tug at the ribbon and well ... David was once again in his full glory. But it was only for a few brief seconds of giggling and flirting. There were no favors of any kind.

Well, one of the women from this evening told a friend who told her friend who well ... two months later I received a request to sit for a bachelorette party on Fraser Street in Vancouver for a gathering of Indo-Canadian women who were celebrating an upcoming arranged marriage. I had never been to an Indo-Canadian gathering before and so against perhaps my better judgment I agreed to sit as an artist model, once again with the proviso that I would wear a loin cloth.

The first thing I should have realized is that I would not be able to understand what is being said. That was not a safe place to walk into ... not knowing what is being said!

The second mistake was I did not know anyone in the room. There was no one there who was chaperoning me! I had had a chaperone at each of the previous gatherings.

That evening I was well out of my element. Not only was I the only man to be seen at the gathering, I was also the only Caucasian at the gathering. The house was large and luxurious and the groom's mother was hosting the get-together. She was an intimidating personality. I realized that the moment she opened the door for me. Unfortunately I arrived a bit late because of bus problems and she was in a bit of a mood. That I could tell by the smell of alcohol on her breath. She was dressed in an expensive looking sarong and wore a great deal of gold jewelry. She was twice my mass even though she was a head shorter than me. And from the beginning she treated me as the hired help.

She led me to a large bathroom to change and told me to be quick with it. I took off my street clothes gathered up my things in my over the shoulder bag and tucked myself into my loin cloth. Then I looked at myself in the brightly lit mirror and stopped to ponder ... 'what am I doing here?'

The moment I stepped from the bathroom the host man handled me into the large living room where obviously no one apart from the groom's mother

knew who was the dessert for the evening. I set my bag down next to the entrance to the living room and stepped into the expansive and brightly lit room, wrapping the drapery close to my body.

Their gathering had just finished an extravagant meal and the last of the dishes were being picked up by a gaggle of young women who were obviously there as hired help. I drew stares from everyone in the room even the young women who were picking up the dishes and were trying to not be distracted by the all but naked man being set before the gathering.

I don't know what the women that had invited me had told the get-together to expect but as I entered the living room with drapery over my shoulders and my loin cloth, I could tell most of the women were surprised, no one more so than the young bride. It must have been an arranged marriage and well ... I doubt she was more than fifteen years old.

I stood at the center of the room and looked around. I had been asked to sit as an artist model, but as I looked around the room there was not a pencil or sketch pad to be seen. I looked across the room at the women who I suspected had been the one to ask me to sit and she quickly turned away, avoiding my glance. I was now worried. Once again I thought 'what am I doing here?'

The room was divided down the middle, with the groom's family to the right and the bride's family to the left. Sitting next to the young bride was perhaps her mother, who was glaring at the groom's mother. She said something in

Indian. It had a sharp edge to it. The bride turned her head and gasped mouth open at her mother.

The groom's mother got up and put her hands on her hips and said something in return. I wanted to step out of the room but the groom's mother gave me the evil eye and told me to stay put.

"I am here as an artist model and nothing else ..." I said this loudly. The bride looked up at me and that sort of told me she understood English. I smiled at her and she barely smiled back at me. I wondered if we both felt pretty much the same at this moment.

Her fleeting smile was caught by the groom's mother who gave her an evil eye. The groom's mother tugged me by the arm and led me closer to the bride. "Stand here!" She turned me to face the young bride. "We will get some paper and pencils."

The groom's mother sat herself down in the most comfortable chair in the room and then said something in Indian. In an instant pencils and small notebooks, the kind that children use in elementary school, appeared and were being distributed among the guests. The bride and her entourage did not pick up the pencils and small notebooks offered them, while the groom's entourage did.

This only frustrated the groom's mother further. She took a long swig on a glass of wine she had on the table beside her. Then she stood up, said



something in Hindi and yanked the drapery off my shoulder. She scowled at the young bride who reluctantly picked up the pencil and her notebook. The rest of the bride's party followed suit.

The bride started to draw. She drew only my face and did so quite expertly. You could tell she was an artist at heart. Her mother drew a bit more of me, while as I glanced around the room most were producing their own versions of stickmen.

There was silence and peace for perhaps ten minutes. When the bride had finished drawing my portrait she set down her pencil and notebook, and her party followed her lead.

The groom's mother said something in Indian, which I did not understand, but the manner in which she said it sent a chill down my spine. I had my back to her and did not expect her to throw me down to the pillows beneath my feet. Before I knew it she was on top of me, with her fat backside in my face. I could feel the loin cloth being torn off of me and her callous hand grabbing me. I was trapped under her mass and pinned between her legs. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the bride staring in horror at the scene transgressing in front of her.

So that's how it was going to be! I thought. I struggled and begged her to stop and to get off of me. The bride was transfixed and did not move. Her mother tried to shield her eyes and was screaming something in Indian. This did not

stop the groom's mother but instead pushed her to a frenzy. I knew it was futile to fight the beast and so I let my body go limp.

I then decided that I will hold myself back as best as I can and then pop like a champagne bottle. Men can do this if they want to. It is a battle between mind over matter. It was a battle of nurture over nature.

And so the beast manhandled me and I let the pressure build within me. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the bride staring at me. I winked at her just as my champagne popped all over the groom's mother. It went all over her expensive dress and across her face and ... well ... probably even into her open mouth as well.

The effect was electric. She threw the best on me down in disgust, lifted her mass off of me and started to kick my left hip and leg. She wore slippers and so the harder she kicked the more she hurt her toes, but she kicked and kicked and swore and swore in Hindi as I scrambled to escape from her madness.

The bride and her entourage were right behind me as we scrambled out the door. I had just enough time to grab my shoulder bag but my shoes were left behind. And there I stood naked at the sidewalk in the street surrounded by the bride and her entourage.

What an outrage the bride's mother shouted. The bride was quiet. She was watching me as I stood before her with my hands over the best of me and my shoulder bag at my feet.

She took pity on me and took her shawl off her shoulders and wrapped it around me my torso. And then in perfect English she said “I am so sorry ...”

“Your English is perfect,” I said.

“Yes, I have been educated in English schools in the UK.”

In my eyes she no longer looked so petite and vulnerable.

My two shoes flew through the air and nearly hit us. Then the bride’s mother shouted back something in Hindi and turned away with a huff.

“What did your mother say?”

With a big smile the bride responded, again in perfect English. “My mother said the wedding is off.” She turned to her mother and said something in Hindi and her mother handed her some keys.

“Here let me drive you home.” I followed her knowing I was in good hands. We have been long distant friends ever since.

## ***Hard Water by Kyle Irion***

“Are you excited?” your mother asks you. She’s putting earrings on and her vision is shifting from her reflection in the bathroom mirror back to you and then back to the mirror.

You’re standing in the doorway to your parents’ bathroom. You’re leaning against the door jamb. The air in the bathroom is hot and thick with steam and you’re ready to leave because you might be sweating. You can’t tell if you’re sweating or if the steam is just accumulating on your forehead. You tell your mother that you’re excited and she says good, but then it’s quiet and you’re waiting for more. You figure out pretty quick that your mother had only called you in to ask you that question and that was it. You huff a little to yourself, then push off of the door jamb you were leaning on. You turn to leave. The air outside the bathroom is cool and feels good against your skin.

As you enter the hallway, your little brother brushes by, almost colliding with you.

Watch out!” he says, like it was your fault. There’s no way to really tell whose fault it was. Right-of-way in domestic hallway situations is kind of a tricky thing.

You watch out!” you call back. You’re hot all over now. Your brother, Ricky, continues down the hallway and into the living room. You go to your room. You’re in your shirt, underwear and socks. You still need pants and stuff.

Your outfit was laid out by your mother the night before, so there's no choosing. Getting ready doesn't take as long as it usually does, so you have an extra few minutes you didn't plan on—an extra few minutes that you never have on Sunday mornings—and you're not sure what to do with yourself. You sit on your bed for a second. You breathe in through your nose and exhale through your mouth. You overhear your mother and your father talking. From where you sit, it is little more than an exchange between higher-pitch, soprano tones and lower, more resonating, baritone tones. The exchange ends and you hear heavy footfalls on carpet, then hard wood, then you turn and your father is in your doorway. He's suspending himself there, standing on one foot, his palms on the doorjamb. It's a slightly athletic pose and you admire how muscular your father is, unlike all your friends' dads, who are all dumpy and sallow.

“Mom says you're excited,” he says.

“Yeah,” you say.

“Well, ten minutes to show time,” he says, then offers a half smile (no teeth), pats the door jamb lightly, and walks down the hall. You hear him admonishing your brother for something.

You scratch your hand because it itches. You feel a little sick. You're not nervous about what you're about to do. You're not so much nervous as much as expectant of a terrible letdown and you don't know why.

In ten minutes, your mother comes by your room and tells you it's time to go. You've been ready for ten minutes. You stand up and walk with your parents and your brother out to your car and leave. You and your brother hardly speak on the drive. Your father listens to your mother tell a story about one of the women she works with on the PTA.

Apparently, Susan O'Tierry's daughter was caught in a parked car in front of her house doing certain things that your mother never says at full volume and your father has to turn his head to see what she's mouthing. More than once you see him pull the corners of his mouth back in a kind of "Yeesh" expression. He even says the word "Yeesh" once or twice. Anyway, so the mother—Susan—goes out there and taps on the glass but, in typical fashion, the glass is foggy and she can't see inside too clearly, but she can see a lot more flesh-toned blurs than she's happy about and she starts knocking harder on the window and there seems to be some sort of mad scramble inside the vehicle and Susan's daughter is telling her mom to hold on, but Susan doesn't want to hold on.

"Personally," your mother says, "I'd want to give them time—I'd want to hold on. If they're doing what she thinks they're doing." Your mother leans to your father slightly. "What we all know they were doing," she leans back. "Why would you want to see that? Seeing all that—" Your father turns to her and lets her know that he catches her drift and she can stop there.

So the mom—Susan, once again—keeps telling her daughter—Teri—to open the “D door” (your mom says “d” instead of “damn.” You know what she means, but pretend you don’t so she feels free to say stories like this in front of you; you grasp full well what’s being depicted and take a small, quiet, guilty pleasure in listening and understanding when your parents think you don’t) or she’s going to break the window. But come on, she’s not going to break the window. Susan says she can hear arguing in the car and that it sounds like Teri is talking to herself the whole time.

By now Susan is less angry and just flat out confused and a little concerned for the well-being of her daughter if she’s in a car with someone with her clothes off and talking to herself so loudly. So Susan starts really freaking out and gets her phone out and shines the screen’s light into the window and then the window comes down and she’s looking at a girl’s face who is not her daughter and her daughter is in the passenger seat and they’re breathing heavily and the two girls in the car are sweating and their makeup is smeared and the girl in the driver seat’s hair is a mess and she looks like the cat that ate the canary—they both do. Susan just nodded like she understood then turned into the house.

“Can you believe that?” your mother asks your father.

“God. Well, at least it’s all out in the open now,” your father responds.

“Yes, but—I mean—if I know, who else knows? I wonder if any of them will come to church anymore—the O’Tierrys. People think things about you when something like that comes out.”

“Mhm,” your dad responds.

The rest of the ride is relatively silent. You have a brief conversation with your brother about your favourite professional wrestlers. You’re pretty sure he makes up at least two, because your brother’s descriptions of their finishing moves defies physics as well as basic physiology and also your brother isn’t allowed to stay up past nine, so how would he watch wrestling anyway? You start to call him out on this, but something in you is tired and you let it go instead.

Your father pulls into the church parking lot. The church is old, but not old enough to appear classic. It’s old enough to look used-up and tired. Your mother’s car gets stolen in this parking lot exactly six weeks from this day.

A strip of bright sunlight stretches across your thigh, making it hot. You move your hand into the strip and out, feeling the heat come and go with your motions. Your father parks the car and gets out. There’s the familiar dinging that is the car telling your father not to forget the keys in the car. Everyone gets out and you sit for two or three seconds in the car by yourself. You allow yourself a brief moment alone. You don’t want it to look like you want the time alone, though. You don’t want to seem dramatic or emotional, so you only allow yourself the two or three seconds that would appear, to those



outside the car, inconspicuous at best and at worst only slightly conspicuous (not meriting comment). After these seconds are up, you open your door and slip off your seat to the ground. The vehicle is higher off the ground than your feet can reach. Through the thin sole of your dress shoe, you're struck by a stab of pain at the ball of your left foot as you land on a sharp stone. You mutter something about stupid rocks and catch up to the rest of your family. Your mother is carrying a beige plastic bag with some clothes in it. Gym shorts and a white t-shirt.

"Well, how are you today?" the preacher asks as you walk into his office with your mother. Your father has taken your little brother to sit down in the sanctuary. Usually, you and your brother would be in a Sunday school class right now, but not today. Today is special.

"I'm good," you say back. You feel very far away from all this right now. You feel like you have as much choice in the direction of your day as a man does the direction of a train.

"This is a very special event in a young man's life," the preacher says. "Or a young woman's," he adds, looking at your mother and smiling sheepishly. She exhales sharply through her nose and smiles in that way that passes for a laugh, but is really just an acknowledgment that one accepts that a joke has been made.

Two nights ago, you rehearsed with the preacher. He stood in the empty baptistery that would in two day's time hold the (holy) water that would

cleanse and save your soul. The preacher held his hand out to you, and you didn't need to take it, but you took it anyway because you didn't want to hurt his feelings. His hand was surprisingly rough for a preacher. You had assumed it would be soft from lack of physical labor. Your father's hands are rough as well, but he works outside for a living. Your mother's hands are soft. Your brother's hands are soft. Your hands are starting to harden and it makes you very proud.

"Are you ready to accept Christ into your heart?" the preacher asks you now.

You're not sure if you're ready or not, though. You're not sure if you know Christ well enough. You're only ten years old. Four years ago, you could pee the bed without anyone looking crossways at you. You wonder if you want Christ in your heart and you wonder if once he's in, he can get back out if you decide you don't love him anymore. If you can't get Christ back out even if you don't love him anymore—if he refuses to leave—does that mean Jesus loves you more or less? You wonder all this in the few seconds it takes to answer, a blast of cold sweat breaking under your arms.

"Yes sir, I am," you answer, unsmiling. The preacher laughs quietly and in a proud way. You think he's going to lean over and tousle your hair, but he doesn't. Your mother puts her hand on your shoulder and its coldness startles you.

"Well, if you all want to go sit down, your seats are already marked off on the front row. Now, remember," he's looking at you now, "during the first hymn,

you need to go through the door on stage left—” he preacher realizes he’s talking to a ten-year-old. “The door on the right when you’re looking at the stage. The door you went in through when we rehearsed.”

You nod and your mother leads you out of the room. You’re still nervous but not excited and this feeling has only swelled since this morning when you woke up with it. You’re wondering if you’ve made the right decision and if this decision will ever stop affecting you—as in, if you decide later that this was a bad decision, can you just wait out its consequences? Will they just fade out over time if you stop putting effort into your relationship with Christ? You hope so, but somehow this seems like the kind of thing where regular logic doesn’t apply.

You sit down by your mother in the sanctuary. The sermon starts and it seems very cold in the room—like they turned on the air just for this special event that would undoubtedly raise the congregation’s cumulative body temperature by at least a few degrees. You hold a hardback Bible in your hands that you took off the seat next to you. You decide to look into the Bible, seeking comfort. You open it and then realize that you don’t know any good verses for stuff like this—scary stuff. Well, you know that there are comforting verses in the Bible, but Jesus says them all, and it’s Jesus you’re scared of.

Your stomach flutters.

The first hymn ends and your mother pushes you to your feet. You walk and open the door and you feel like the eyes of the entire right side of the

congregation are staring at you, although in actuality only a few people glanced over and then back to the preacher. He's a good preacher. You can't miss a word.

You walk into the room and close the door. The sound of the preacher's voice is immediately muted to a dull rumble. The room feels colder than the sanctuary had felt. There are two pairs of galoshes on the ground and two white robes. One galosh/robe set is much larger than the other. You swallow hard. You realize you've forgotten your other clothes—the clothes you're going to get wet—the clothes in the beige plastic bag your mother was carrying. You get a little sick and then are washed in a feeling much like homesickness. You turn to go back out, but at that moment the door opens and it's your mother and you just want her to take you home; you're not ready. You walk up to her to tell her this, but she just holds the bag through the small opening she's created with the door. You reach out and take it and, looking at your mother's face as she shuts the door, you want very badly to cry.

You're all of a sudden angry at your mother and father. You're angry at your preacher. You don't want to be here. Your parents should know that. They shouldn't be making you do this. Are they making you do this? They never forced you. They never took your hand and made you sign a pledge. They never took your heart and rendered it unto Him. You made this decision, but it sure doesn't feel like you did. You wonder if it's possible to force someone to do something without actively forcing them at all.

The first hymn begins and the stage door opens. The preacher smiles at you and steps down from the elevated place where the stage door opens from. You look from that door to the door you came in through.

“Hey, you need to change!” the preacher says with urgency but not anger. He points to a screen that you just now notice is there.

You get behind the screen and change into your gym shorts and white t-shirt. You’re about to wad the bag up when you notice a small piece of paper in it, stuck to one of the sides. You take out the note. “Good luck, buddy!” it says. “Love, Mom.” There’s a heart drawn in the lower corner. You put the note in your pocket, fully aware that it’s going to be ruined in the water. You don’t care, though. The note reminds you that your mother is close by and this puts you at ease some and you need it, because now your hands are cold and sweaty and you feel like you might throw up.

At the rear of the room is another set of stairs that goes to a place higher than the stage. It is behind this door that, after a short walk down a corridor with a high ceiling, you reach the baptistery. The preacher turns and makes his way up the stairs. You’re struggling to put on your galoshes. You had put your robe on first and now it keeps getting in the way when you try to pull the long, rubbery boots to their proper place on your legs. As you pull the boots on, you notice—for the first time—a dusting of black hairs among the blonde ones on your left leg. You smile a little and you put your hand on your leg as if to tell it good job. Your preacher clears his throat and you know he isn’t trying to clear his throat. You get up and climb the stairs. You’re now standing behind

him and you can smell his cologne through the robe. He opens the door and walks through, gesturing for you to come with him. The corridor smells dank and it's difficult to see. The ground is dusty.

Years from now, you will admit to yourself that you do not believe in God. You will surrender to doubt while standing in a crowded auditorium full of people your age who are all weeping and lamenting their young sins while a singer with a guitar commands a line of ushers in the back of the room to begin collecting the offering. You will lose someone very near to you and Jesus won't help you, because why would he help you when he didn't help your friend? You will begin to feel false at family gatherings and when everyone's eyes fall to pray you will feel embarrassed for them and then you'll close your eyes too because the look on everyone's faces makes your stomach hurt and you can't stop thinking of Hell.

You reach the baptistery and the preacher steps in and wades to its center. The hymn closes in that abrupt, applause-less way that all hymns end. The room is totally quiet except for the beat of your heart. You can't see your parents. You may be able to see them when you're in the water. You feel like you're up against something hot. Something is at your back and it feels immovable and alive. You turn around and look. There is a small blade of light coming from the under the door of the room you were just in. You don't remember closing that door, but the door is closed. You look to the preacher. As he speaks, he gesticulates with his arms in wide motions. Finally, he pauses for a long time and looks out over the congregation. He turns to you and reaches out his hand.

You think that this isn't how you wanted this to be and you don't feel any better and you wonder if Jesus wanted this for you and you think that if He did He isn't any kind of friend and you're so scared because now He's going to live inside you and everything depends on it.

{ first published in this Great Society in Aug. 2011 }

## ***Finely Distinguished Knowledge by Thomas Cairns***

*“‘Sir,’ said Stephen, ‘I read novels with the utmost pertinacity. I look upon them – I look upon good novels – as a very valuable part of literature, conveying more exact and finely-distinguished knowledge of the human heart and mind than almost any other, with greater breadth and depth and fewer constraints.’” (p. 253, *The Nutmeg of Consolation*, Patrick O’Brian).*

The addiction was immediate, and quite accidental. A few innocent pages into Patrick O’Brian’s extended narrative about “Lucky” Jack Aubrey, post-captain in His Majesty’s Royal Navy, and his friend Stephen Maturin, ship’s surgeon, naturalist and spy, and I was irretrievably snared. Granted, I am especially susceptible to getting caught up in fictional webs characterized by the clatter of a chaise-and-four running over the cobblestones of foggy London streets, the smell of gunpowder and the roar of cannon fire, and the deliciously tense formal restraint of a certain class of society in early 19th-century Britain. The 21 sequential novels published over 30 years have been called “the best historical novels ever written,” and while I might not go so far as that, for such energetically plotted adventure stories they conceal a surprising amount of depth and nuance.

The Aubrey-Maturin stories achieve their addictive quality through a number of devices – the characters are complex and multi-faceted, the historical detail is almost excruciatingly exact, and a wonderfully dry wit saturates the narrative. In addition, the central relationship between Captain Aubrey and



Dr. Maturin, more than any naval battle or domestic intrigue, gives the books a compulsive momentum and emotional core. But, I would argue, what ultimately defines the novels and makes them worthy of further reflection is the brilliance of O'Brian's language.

The books are a fantastic web of complex language, defined by rhythm, cadence and peculiar obscurity that form a complete narrative world. A new reader of O'Brian's works will recognize his significant debt to Jane Austen and also the unavoidable fact that there are moments when the books are entirely incomprehensible. O'Brian regularly uses Napoleonic era naval jargon without any definition. This is not the cartoonish "ahoy matey" and "yo-ho-ho" of pirate movies, but an intricate world of specific terminology, purposely unintelligible to the reader. It is clear that O'Brian recognizes that most readers might be a little foggy on just what the "sprit-sail yardarm" might be, or what exactly the bellowed order "boom him off the backstay" might entail. But he clearly delights in the immersive properties of the language, buoying readers along in their vaguely amused ignorance by brilliant use of rhythm and cadence.

In this way, the form of the novels mirrors the world described within them – the world of Napoleonic Europe with its strict societal and cultural codes of language and practice, and more specifically the rituals and language particular to the Royal Navy itself. A recurring feature in the early books is the introduction of new crewmembers to Captain Aubrey's ships – frequently men who have been "pressed" from local prisons or picked up off the streets to aid in the national struggle against Napoleon. These "landsmen" are

typically a “stupid, unhandy set of lubbers on the whole,” and tend to be useless as sailors, at least at first, finding the network of naval language that surrounds them just as incomprehensible as the reader does. Yet, over time, as the landsmen become initiated into the life of the ship, they demonstrate not just comprehension of their new world, but become actual participatory members of the community. As previously foreign rituals such as exercising the great guns in the evening and swabbing the deck each morning before dawn become embodied practice, the landsmen undergo an unconscious transformation into naval sailors, ready to crack on under close reefed topsails in a fierce squall or drive an axe into a French officer’s thigh when boarding an enemy deck.

In this way, the Aubrey-Maturin novels are rather brilliant reflections on the relationship between identity and the uncertainty of human life. The strange language of the Royal Navy and its complex of holy practices are not extraneous to the sailors and ships, but actually constitute the floating worlds that glide along the ocean’s surface, seeking opportunities to erupt into thunderous violence against the enemies of good King George. The members of a sailing ship are unusually aware of the radical insecurity of life as they depend on the vagaries of currents, winds and the integrity of the tar, wood and canvas constructions which propel them to the far sides of the world. The language and rituals which define the lives of those immersed in them are meant to create a certain type of character, a certain set of virtues, so that when luck turns sour they will still be able to tie a crowned double-wall knot in the midst of heaving swell.

Part of the attraction of the novels, of the roots of their addictiveness, of my frankly embarrassing love for them, is due to the incomprehensible language and not in spite of it. There is a certain appeal in the fact that a reader can see in a more explicit way what often remains hidden: namely the complex framework of language and repeated practices that shapes our own characters.

As the quote at the beginning of the essay states, fiction has a way of conveying an “exact and finely distinguished knowledge of the human heart and mind.” Even pulse-pounding serial adventure stories like the Aubrey-Maturin novels can prompt us to imagine ourselves using new language. Crossing the boundary of fiction and undergoing immersion in a distinctly different world forces us to question what implicit networks of language and ritual practice we are enmeshed in, and what sorts of virtues these practices and languages are shaping within us. Not to say that the mystery of who and how I am becoming can ever be exhausted, but the questioning is not entirely in vain: a particular nakedness of self is exposed when the bewildering drunken veering of life collides with our best laid plans, when a mysterious ship appears hull up on the horizon, or when a confused, tumbling cross-sea tosses us in unexpected directions.

{First Published in This Great Society Oct. 2011}

## ***An Evening of Baroque by Jose Chaves***

It's past midnight. I'm hunkered down with a chunky gal from the art gallery, the one with the thick glasses and impasto cheeks. The coffee table is stacked with take-out boxes, her earrings, a copy of *The Brothers Karamozov*, and 24 empty bottles from wine coolers that stand witness to our loneliness. But this Rubenesque angel, stretched across my couch in full scale, has forgiven the horns rising from my temples, my cloven hooves and hideous snout, as she beckons me with a stubby finger into the bedroom.

I rear up on my hind legs to follow and I can't help but think of old man Karamazov, his ability to find something erotic in any woman, no matter how homely, as I'm drawn to her clavicle like some strange sexual beacon. For in that delicate curve, that stretch of horizon where the wind delicately lashes the dark oil of time, I focus on the gentle strokes of her collar, kiss her softly about the face and neck, while groping those cornucopias of flesh like candied apples.

The next morning, we awake to find ourselves trapped inside a painting at the art gallery, unable to hide from the constant tours of school children who point and giggle at our nakedness.

## ***Behind Closed Doors by Jennifer Macaire***

You must have seen her when you lived on the islands. Her jeans were faded and embroidered. She wore plastic sandals and carried a guitar. She never went to school. She went to visit sick friends or to the beach. What was the funniest thing you ever said to her? Did it make her laugh? When she laughed, did she tilt her head back and open her mouth so wide you could see all her white teeth? If she tipped her head back, her hair would touch her thighs; it would sweep against them as your hand ached to.

Did you hear her sing? When she sang in one of the tourist bars I would go to see her. I would sit in the shadows and drink, my arm over another girl's shoulder.

I wish I had the foresight to bring a tape recorder with me, but I didn't. I have to close my eyes and listen hard now to hear her voice, and often it gets confused with the wind in the trees.

How old would she be now? It doesn't matter. I don't care—to me she'll always be a teenager with her mouth folded in defiance.

I'll tell you a secret.

One day, when we were lying in bed talking, my mother came home from work to check on me. I was supposed to be ill. I was home from school. There was no time to hide; she barely had time to dart under my covers before my

mother came in and sat down on my bed. My mother never knew I had a girl, unclad, huddled next to my body. She was so lithe, so slender, that her body melded with mine, the covers stayed obediently bunched over her head, and my mother never noticed a thing.

She put her hand on my brow (damp with sweat and burning with effrontery) and told me I looked flushed. She left after bringing me a cup of tea and some toast. All the while there was a naked girl in my bed, pressed as closely to me as a salamander. When my mother's car drove away I pushed the covers back and smiled at her. She started laughing. I didn't love her yet, but it was a start.

I went to see her in New York City after she'd left the islands. She had cast off her tattered, harlequin jeans and wore a warm sweater. It made her look fragile.

She went with me to a party, and she didn't drink—she never drank. She liked to smoke, though—to get stoned—and by the end of the evening, her smile was as wide as the Hudson River. I tried to talk her into coming back with me to the apartment I'd rented, but she shook her head.

She kissed me softly on the mouth, but she was the type to close doors behind her and never open them again.

## ***Katie's Nightmare by Christopher Stires***

“Daddy!” she cried.

I was scribbling research notes at my desk when I heard her call out for me. Immediately, without hesitation, I jumped up and dashed down the hall to her bedroom. All eight years and fifty pounds of her latched onto me like a vise-grip as I knelt beside her bed. I could feel her little body trembling against my breast and her little fingers digging into my wounded arm.

“What’s wrong, pumpkin?” I asked, stroking her hair.

She answered, but her reply was muffled by my shirt. It took a moment for me to understand what she was saying.

“What’s under the bed?”

“D-Dracula,” she whispered.

I hugged her closer and wished my wife wasn’t away for the night, visiting her mother. She was much better at this than I was. She wouldn’t have let Katie watch that old horror movie earlier. But I’d thought watching Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi was a much better idea than watching the latest atrocities on CNN. Why didn’t kids come with an owner’s manual?

“There’s no Dracula,” I said. “He’s make-believe.”

She shook her head. “He came out of the c-closet and slipped under the bed. He wanted to suck the blood from my toes.”

Slowly, ever so slowly, I eased from her death-hug and peered under the bed. When I straightened up, Katie had her knees up to her quivering chin and her covers coiled tightly around her.

I smiled my best I’m-here-and-you’re-safe smile. “Nothing under there except one dirty sock, two Pokemon cards, and a colony of dust bunnies.”

“He was there.” Her voice was so sure. I wished I could be so positive in my beliefs.

“Dracula was a character created by Bram Stoker. Frankenstein’s monster was made up by Mary Shelley. It’s all make-believe.”

“He wasn’t real, Daddy?”

“No. Pretend. Like Casper the Friendly Ghost.”

“Grammy believes in ghosts.”

“Your grammy needs...” I stopped myself before I said something that I would regret. Something that would have me sleeping on the sofa when Katie repeated it to her mother. “What’s my job, honey?”



Katie peered at me with her big, deep-blue eyes. “You write stories.”

“That’s right. I make up tales about goblins and spooks and aliens from outer space. I write stories just like—”

“—Stephen King and Dean Koontz,” she finished. She knew my routine better than I did. “You tell lies for fun and profit.”

“That’s right.” I kissed her forehead.

“Mommy says you take unnecessary risks when you do research. Like when you went to the Carpet Mountains.”

“Carpathian,” I corrected.

“What’s a risk?”

When did she overhear that argument? “Mommy worries too much.”

Katie snuggled down under her covers. “I’m okay now, Daddy. I’m glad you’re home. Will you leave the hall light on, please?”

“Yes.”

I walked back to my tiny study, rubbing the bite-scar on my arm. The full moon would rise in two days.

There are no vampires.

There are no werewolves.

There are no...

## ***New Millennium Sex by Maryanne Stahl***

No one wants to fuck Cheryl anymore. That's what she thinks. Cheryl is doing her laundry in the basement of her apartment building, sorting delicates from the regular load. A Greek woman emptying the one working dryer frowns at her. Cheryl has been caught staring at her own underwear. It is the stain on a pair of gray silk panties that has brought this irrefutable truth—that no one wants to fuck her—to mind.

Cheryl wore the gray silk panties on Thursday, when James took her for dinner and then drinks back at his hotel. They “fooled around” (his words) and he came on her behind. He didn't say as much, but he wouldn't actually fuck her and she didn't expect him to. No one will anymore. It isn't safe, these days (who wants to use a condom the first time?). And, with many of the men she meets (married), it is technically verboten.

You aren't really cheating if you don't fuck. You aren't doing anything dangerous. Cheryl knows this is what James thinks.

If his wife ever asks, “did you fuck her?” He can rightly answer no! He might, depending on the depth of his character, even add, Of course not!

A blow job is okay. Cheryl gave James a blow job when they fooled around again an hour after the panty stain, just like she gave Tom at that Christmas party and Steve at the beach. Tom also rubbed his dick between her round, wet breasts (he'd poured Chardonnay between them); Steve stuck his fingers

so far up inside her, she remembered her next doctor's appointment. All of them licked her and rubbed her and squeezed the cheeks of her ass. They did everything they could think of—after all, they weren't inhibited—everything except fuck.

The laundry room is empty now. Cheryl lifts the gray silk panties from the small pile of delicates and holds them to her face. She tries to smell James, tries to remember the thrilling skip of her breath when he reached for her hand beneath the table, tries to remember the look in his eyes she thought meant he wanted her. As in really. Cheryl breathes deeply, and though the panties smell more like the musty bottom of her bathroom hamper than anything else, she remembers James' skin. She remembers her face pressed into his neck when he told her that she couldn't spend the night. And when at last she tosses the gray silks into the washing machine, another stain has blotted out the first.

## ***Reading Sex by Ryan Nelson***

For him sex and romance were literary categories.

As they undressed in her bedroom, the idea of “taking the heaven from inside of her and turning it into a burnt wheat field” popped into his head. It was a desperate thought, really. He loosened his tie. Something in him was strangling. She waited on the bed in her underwear, rubbing her feet together playfully.

During puberty and his early '20s, he'd read so many books before his nine o'clock bedtime that, he assured himself, without doubt, even though he'd never had one in the flesh, he'd had plenty of girls by proxy.

He had been cocky from the first day of their relationship. *He* had actually asked *her* out. An old man had tripped on some broken concrete in front of his house. She had come to the rescue and had asked to use his phone to call the old man's son. He thought, “kindness floated on her like mist over London.” She seemed accessible to him.

On their third date she had asked him, “Are you a playful little boy?”

He had never been winked at like that before. He could tell she conducted these matters on eye-to-eye ground. Obviously, he was not on that level. But the fact that she assumed he was made him sit straight and smile.

Up to this point he had likened their relationship to a whitewater river. Tonight, on the way to her house, he felt like he was going over the falls.

Now, nearly naked, he watched her wiggle and mess up the bed sheets. Those luxurious wrinkles bothered him. He caught the view of the two of them in the mirror above her dresser. In a scene like this, he wondered, how could any man worry? The fact that he worried distressed him even more.

“What’s the matter?” A stray chocolate brown curl flopped over her eye.

He felt like a harried plate spinner. His hesitation to start “The Carnival of Love” allowing a few plates to fall.

“What about this? Maybe this will speed up the race.” She proficiently kicked off her panties and undid her bra. The sight of her wearing nothing gave him what he called the “Raskolnikov Shakes.”

Her pubic hair didn’t seem as confined and tamed as it was in paintings he had seen. Her breasts were flatter than all those statues had brought him to expect.

“You’re shaking.”

“Ah, I’m not...” He felt more exposed than he would have if he’d actually removed his boxers. Now that all was laid bare, he flashed on their future together. The practicality of the relationship certainly wouldn’t change. But

he questioned if she would still smile the same light-bending hello? Would they still have the same coy conversations?

Like a flash of lightning in a storm, a Raymond Chandler quote occurred to him. “Beyond fear, beyond change.” It was a description of a dead guy.

## ***Thighs Like Fresh Peaches by Patti See***

When you lay your bag of groceries on the wooden bar top, your milk and bread and fruit remind you that you have parents and children, somewhere.

Each bartender knows your face by what you drink, and this one sets a mug of beer before you and a bourbon for your lover. You are a couple only here, this place with pool cues in a barrel in the middle of the barroom and Bessie Smith on the jukebox. The regulars know your movements, hands in a strange gesture they mimic a table away. They guess the secrets you keep together, know from the way you walked in tonight—snow-caked scarves and steamed glasses—the songs you’ll play again, standing shoulder to shoulder, as close to dancing as any public place allows.

You chose the fruit together at a corner grocery store. Your lover held each piece to his nose, turned each one round in his hand. He said, “We’ve never shopped for real groceries together.” A melodrama only you and he appreciate. When you walked along the street to the bar, biting into your fruit, the nectar ran down your arms, soaking your coatsleeves to bare wrists. Later tonight, in bed beside your husband, you will remember a skin that gives and takes.

You held the fruit to your lover’s face and rubbed the fuzz to his cheek. You started to say, “Winter thighs like mine.” Instead came out, “It’s summer somewhere.”



At the bar with peach pits in your pocket, you imagine how you might be different without these other lives, when you're together fulltime. He will say Just three drinks and mean it. Your hives will disappear. He won't need Ziploc baggies of homegrown skunkweed to write your story the way you tell favorite parts to each other in a dark booth.

Mornings you will wake with him and fit everything in. Groceries and pets. Children and jobs. Every conversation mystical and true; odd seams between finished and start anew.

Tonight the surfer boy bartender will leave a paper sack for him, folded like a Valentine, on the edge of the bar. You slip it into your bag of fruit, tell yourself it is medicinal and thereby nearly healthy. When your lover slips to the men's room, you imagine his dried plants, as you've seen them before when he rolls a joint on your belly, tongues the remnants from your navel, lovely as the parsley you sprinkle on your husband's pasta. Within minutes a single hundred-dollar bill has been passed from hand to hand before the urinal. Your lover reappears wearing his coat and hat, your parka draped over his arm.

You stop a block from his house and kiss him in your cold car. In the darkness his mouth is a living thing, each kiss eats back. Your husband will never know the story of your night. His wife has no way of knowing he's carrying home a bag of poems.

**Two ... in perfect form ...**



## ***The Naked Truth About Nude Art Modeling by Robin Bernstein***

Over the years I've scrutinized, squinted at and visually dissected every inch of easily more than 100 naked humans. That's because my passion is figure drawing, so I rack up a lot of hours staring at unclothed adults. Yet these men and women — old and young, all shapes, sizes and ethnicities — whose bodies are exposed from every angle, whose nude images grace my walls, remain unknown to me. I rarely know their names.

Who are these people who bare all to a room full of strangers? How does it feel to pose under unforgiving lights as students mentally measure the distance from your clavicle to pubis? I often wonder what it takes to do a job most know little about yet is essential to rendering the human figure in art.

My first model was not nude and not even human. As a kid I relentlessly drew Astro Boy, my favorite TV cartoon character, which made me an anime fangirl decades before Pokémon. By the time I took my first life drawing class at 17, I was hooked and, in the decades that followed, I took classes at various schools when time allowed. It's one of the few activities in which I truly feel like I'm "in the zone."

There's a routine: A model poses on a platform surrounded by students at easels or in chairs. It usually starts with a series of dynamic gestures, one-minute poses so named because the goal is to capture the movement. There might be several five-, 10- and 20-minutes poses in a typical three-hour session. After every 20 minutes, there's a break when the model dons a robe.

If a pose continues beyond that, it's marked on the platform with tape so the model can resume the same position.

I've asked myself if I'd ever have the guts to pose nude for a class. Twice I'd done it clothed — once while pregnant — when the model was a no-show and volunteers were needed. And in my early twenties, a photographer friend who shot artsy black-and-white nudes of my roommate offered to do the same for me. I was game, but that was in the privacy of my home. In college I drew myself nude, again in private; it was homework, as I recall.

Would I disrobe now, for a class? Depending on my mood and wine intake, the answer ranges from “sure, why not?” to “not a snowball's chance in hell!” So when I got an email from the Art Students League of New York where I now study, with the subject line “Curious about modeling for art? Learn all about it this Thursday,” I opened it.

“Have you ever been intrigued by what it's like to be a nude art model?”

Why, yes! Yes, I have.

“Modeling for fine art is challenging and personally rewarding work that requires professionalism, confidence, creativity, and a willingness to be vulnerable in a studio setting.”

Was I professional? Of course!

Confident? Yes.

Creative? Sure!

Willing to be vulnerable? Uh, can I get back to you on that?

I clicked reply and typed, “Will attend.” I had this crazy idea that I’d model once and write about it. When I told four writer friends over dinner about my plan, their unanimous response was “great idea!” Which of course made me think, if this is such a great idea, how come none of you are doing it?

When I told my boyfriend, his reply was somewhat less enthusiastic. “You’re really gonna do that?” he asked, wide-eyed.

This is not what you want to hear from the man who sees you naked, and I suggested as much.

“No, you look great!” he clarified, and of course he’d never dream of stopping me from doing what I want. What he couldn’t fathom was why anyone would want to do it in the first place, especially at our age. I should note that we’re both within spitting distance of 60.

I knew I could be a good model. For the most part, I like my body, although I could do without the post-menopausal pounds that cling stubbornly to my hips and belly. It’s a healthy and fit body that plays drums, does yoga and used to take dance. Naked after a shower, I’d strike poses in front of the mirror that I

knew students would like to draw because they were poses I'd like to draw. In class I'd watch the models and think, "I can do that!"

And what better place to model than the League, with its all-star cast of famous artists who have studied or taught there since 1875, when it was founded? But when the model coordinator emailed me several openings for a model, I promptly panicked. It would not be for the same class I was taking as a student, but I was unnerved that people from my class also might be in the one I modeled for. I wanted an ironclad guarantee that I'd know nobody there and would never see any of them again, ever, for the rest of my life. This clearly does not qualify as "a willingness to be vulnerable in a studio setting."

I turned to five models, most of whom had modeled for my class, who were happy to tell me about their job. One was Ivan, a 26-year-old financial software developer with a gentle smile and six-pack abs, who moved to New York nine years ago from his native Dominican Republic. It turned out we share an alma mater: Binghamton University, where I took my first life drawing class more than four decades ago. His jitters before his first nude modeling gig in the Fine Arts building, where I'd spent so much time as a student, sounded familiar. "I didn't want any of my friends to be in the class," he said.

And for good reason, like the time I walked into my life drawing class in the Fine Arts Building and did a double-take, because standing nude on the platform was my neighbor — a guy I'd recently gone on a first-and-definitely-last date with and who 10 minutes earlier had given me a ride to campus. I'm

guessing by the look on his face that he was praying for a trap door to fall through.

Brianna, a 29-year-old actor and dancer from the Midwest who requested a pseudonym to protect her privacy, said that she, too, wavered at first. Her roommate was a nude art model and Brianna found it fascinating. But when that roommate offered to help find her modeling work, cold feet trumped burning curiosity. “I was like, whoa! Now I was faced with the reality of, can I do this?”

Ever since Adam and Eve were booted from their naked paradise, presumably in search of fig leaves, humans have had a fraught relationship with public nudity. Cultural norms vary, by generation or geography, from puritanical to ambivalent to let-it-all-hang-out. Trends come and go, the streakers of the 1970s making way for the naked yoga devotees of today. In this post-#MeToo era, people even debate if certain artwork should be banished from museums. In January, “Hylas and the Nymphs” was removed from the Manchester Art Gallery in England to challenge its depiction of female nudity, prompting an outcry to have it returned.

I’ve personally seen these mores shift. Once upon a time, nude sunbathing was common on certain stretches of New York’s Fire Island National Seashore. Years ago, my then-husband and I and our kids, then 9 and 7, walked from Robert Moses State Park to Kismet — a two-mile stretch — and realized halfway that we’d need to walk through a clothing-optional beach. We did, of course, and my kids somehow still managed to grow up to be healthy well-adjusted young adults. Regrettably, conservative voices

prevailed; five years ago authorities there began enforcing laws banning nude sunbathing.

I wondered if anyone I knew would model nude, so I asked my Facebook friends: an admittedly biased sample of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers who, like me, spend far too much time online in migraine-inducing political debates or blithely posting pics of the sunset. Of the 38 who bothered to respond, nearly half the men and two-thirds of the women wrote variations of “no, never, nope, not a chance, not my gig,” and lest I misunderstand, one typed in all caps: NEVER NO WAY NO HOW.

Another said, “Stand naked in front of people and have them interpret the way my body looks? That’s a hard pass.” Others said they “couldn’t sit still long enough” or were “too insecure” or lacked self-confidence or cited “religious reasons (public nudity is a huge no-no)” or lamented that they were too old, although one pragmatic soul said she’d do it “if it was a matter of life or death.”

Of the rest said who said they would (just over 20 percent) or hedged their bets with “maybe,” there was one who, like me, would do it only if nobody knew her personally. “It would depend on the reputation of the art school,” said another. And one said she’d pose “waist up only” while another who long ago had modeled nude warned against that: “Naked is naked. Clothed is clothed. Partially clothed is seductive.” A friend with cerebral palsy said she did it as an undergrad to help her grow more comfortable in her body (and for the money).



And because no Facebook thread is complete without a comedian: LOL to the considerate guy who would remain draped because he's from "the first-do-no-harm school of modeling." And to the one who'd do it if Botero was instructing.

If my survey determined that most of my friends would rather poke themselves in the eye with a sharp stick than pose nude, it didn't reveal what they might not understand about the job. Emily, 32 (she, too, requested a pseudonym for privacy), who started modeling as an undergrad in California for extra cash, feels the biggest misconception is that people think there's a sexual element when in fact "it's so not sexual at all." Similarly, MacKenzie, a tall athletic 25-year-old from Connecticut who's been modeling in New York since last fall, thinks most folks see nudity as intimate, "something that most people don't want to share with anyone except their partner."

The right word can avoid the wrong connotation. "If I'm in the shower and I'm washing my hair, I'm naked," said long-time model Alan. But he said that on the model stand, "I'm nude." A self-described rebel with a short grey beard, Alan, 65, started modeling in 1985 as a single dad in Georgia disillusioned with his business career and trying to redefine his life. On a whim, driving by the Lamar Dodd School of Art, he pulled into the parking lot and applied for work as a nude model. He's since turned it into a successful full-time job, modeling at several schools in New York, sometimes with his wife. He plans to retire this year.

Several of these models mentioned fear of judgment — putting your every perceived physical imperfection on display — as a reason nude modeling is such a scary prospect. Yet I can attest that when I’m drawing the unclothed human figure, the only thing I’m judging is how good my drawing is. It’s not remotely erotic. You’re not thinking about their nudity. In fact, you’re not thinking about them much at all. “You’re basically reducing them to geometry,” said Emily.

She’s right. We’re taught to view the body as a mass of overlapping shapes: cubes, spheres, cylinders, pyramids and cones. We analyze angles and tilt. We find the centerline and identify front, top and side planes. We consider where light hits tangent to an arm or breast because that’s where shadow begins. There’s so much talk about the musculoskeletal system that I sometimes feel like I’m in anatomy class.

While we students grapple with the abstract challenge of rendering bodies on paper, these all-too-human models face the very real task of holding a pose. Contrapposto, for example, where weight rests more on one leg like Michelangelo’s David, is very difficult to maintain. “You can really screw yourself,” said MacKenzie. “You don’t necessarily always know what’s going to hurt your body.”

Brianna learned this early on. Modeling the very first time, she “was absolutely a wreck with nerves” but within five minutes of her first pose, all she could think about was her foot, which had fallen dead asleep. “That was the last time I ever worried about being naked.”

To demonstrate how hard it is to hold a pose for 20 minutes, Alan suggests I pretend to squeeze a ball in my hand for five minutes because that stiffness and pain is “what your entire body is going to experience.” If he feels a muscle cramp coming on, he’s learned to calm his body by going into what he calls “Zen master” mode, slowing himself down to roughly five breaths per minute.

But arguably more difficult is the discipline to be alone with your thoughts. “I wish my mind would go blank so badly,” said MacKenzie, who during poses will ponder her love life or her career or writes songs in her head for her band. The biggest surprise for Ivan was that it’s more mental than physical. “In one 20-minute pose you can go through your whole ‘to do’ list, your five-year goal plans, your 10-year goal plans,” he said, laughing. He learned that meditation and staying present in the moment keep him from zoning out. “My job is not to hold the pose; it’s to be the pose,” he said. If he thinks too much, he tends to nod off.

I wondered, too, if the gender of the artist mattered, like it did for the woman who wrote, in reply to my Facebook survey: “Too many negative experiences with men who pretend to have artistic souls. No desire to be objectified by any of them, even for the sake of their art. If it were all females in the class, I would consider.” In fact, a recent New York Magazine story asked in the wake of #MeToo, if it’s “still an artistically justifiable pursuit for a man to paint a naked woman.” But with all this uproar about the male gaze, why was nobody asking the opinions of those being gazed upon? After all, it’s their naked image being turned into art.

What these models told me, in essence, is that an artist's gender takes a back seat to the vibe a person gives off. Ultimately, says MacKenzie, it's not about male or female but about "being professional, treating me with respect, making me feel comfortable."

While Emily will ask why most artwork in a gallery might be by men, she is rabidly anti-censorship and would never tell anyone they can't make the art they want to make. As for whether the male gaze is relevant to her job, she is indifferent. "It doesn't really affect my desire to model in any way."

Brianna, too, has never had a problem with men painting her. "They're looking at me through artist's eyes, and if I ever felt like they were looking at me sexually, I don't think I would be comfortable doing it," she said, adding that some of the most beautiful paintings of her have been done by men. "What a shame that would be if they weren't allowed to create that."

For them it's less about an unwanted gaze than an unwanted touch. "If someone is getting too close to the modeling stand you almost can feel it," said Alan, describing the time a student grabbed his arm from behind to shift it and how he swung around and laid into the guy: "Do you know how close you came to me just knocking you off your feet? Don't you ever, ever touch a model again!" He is blunt: "I'm not a prop."

As Emily explains, your bubble of personal comfort expands when you're wearing less. She was more upset by a woman who physically moved her hand

during a pose “like I’m a poseable store mannequin” than the guy who annoyingly flirted but did not touch her during a break. Touching a model is never OK and fortunately, she says, most students are hyperaware of this. I know I am; I’ll always give models wide berth during a pose. Those boundaries extend to cell phones, which at the League are prohibited during poses. And doors to the studio remain shut; if you’re not a student or instructor, you don’t belong there.

And let’s not forget that male models have their own biological vulnerability. One question Ivan hears a lot is if he ever gets an erection during a pose. “The answer is yes,” he admitted, although he tries his best to stop it. Then again, Alan said that in 32 years it’s never happened to him during a pose. Over the years, I’ve seen a partial erection in class only a couple of times. I always feel bad for the guy; I don’t know what they’re thinking but it usually fades fast. Besides, as Ivan points out, it’s not something most students are looking at. “Artists tend to leave the fingers and the toes for last, and most tend to leave the penis for last, too,” he said. Or as Alan put it, “I am portrayed in probably several thousand [of] pieces of art as a eunuch.”

But if I were to assume that the model is exposed and that I, the art student, remain hidden, Emily turned that on its head. “People tend to ask if I feel exposed up there, but I feel like it’s really the artists that are being exposed,” she said, because each reveals a different interpretation of her. “I get to see inside their heads.” Like the time she was in a crappy mood and a student portrayed her expression as sweet and vulnerable.

What's more, Emily's heritage is, as she describes it, "a blend of Asian and African and Western European and every immigrant group." With indeterminate multi-racial features, she's like a Rorschach test for art students. "You have this idea in your head of how people see you," she said. "And a lot of the time it's not what you think." She told me how sometimes black students might emphasize her lips or nose, and a Japanese student once gave her a painting he did of her. "It still looks like me," she said. "But the Japanese version of me."

Ivan, too, says that artists give a part of themselves to their work. "The drawing is the model, but at the same time, the drawing is the artist," he said.

But what I really want to know is how they summon that elusive capacity to be so, well, nakedly vulnerable. Perhaps it's because for these models the rewards of posing nude are many. When I asked MacKenzie if disrobing for a class is like the fear of jumping into an ice-cold swimming pool, she was mystified. "It's more like jumping into the air, like being able to fly or something, you're just very free," she said with obvious delight. Compared to her old bartending job, which she hated, modeling doesn't drain her and allows time for her artistic endeavors.

Emily, too, would come home emotionally exhausted from her former job in sales. But after modeling, she feels creatively inspired. "It doesn't suck the energy away from the other things I want to do," she said. For Ivan, it's a way to stay connected to drawing, a talent he displayed as a child but never pursued. For Alan, it's a performing art; he's a muse who controls the energy

of the room with poses that provide a narrative. It's this aspect of modeling that I find most compelling.

What attracted Brianna to modeling is precisely how exposed it is, which is the very thing that terrifies me. She told me that she's in recovery from an eating disorder and body dysmorphia, which is when you focus non-stop on what you think are your physical flaws. By any standard, Brianna is beautiful, but she said there were times before modeling when she could barely look at herself naked in the mirror. "As someone with broken eyes, I needed to see myself through eyes of someone else," she said.

Posing nude helped. "You're looking at what someone finds beautiful in you," she said, like when students tell her how fun it is to paint her skin. "I would never in my life think my ghostly white skin is a plus!" She now can look in a mirror and see things she likes about her body. "That was not ever something I thought was possible," she said. "This whole job is such a victory for me."

The way these models talked about the perks of their job made me wonder why nude modeling wasn't a therapeutic requirement for anyone who's ever felt self-conscious, self-critical or just plain uninspired. Still, I couldn't shake my queasiness about doing it.

Again I flashed back to college, this time to a clothing-optional beach where my friends and I spent a day together in the altogether, frolicking in our own naked Garden of Eden. But when I unexpectedly ran into a grad student I'd been flirting with — who was wearing shorts — suddenly I was trapped in a

real-life version of that nightmare where you go to school and realize you have no clothes on. My first instinct was to grab the nearest towel. But I knew that would only expose my embarrassment, so I didn't. And I suspect he felt exposed for being too uptight to strip down, which brought me back to Emily's observations about who is really exposed: model or artist.

Will I draw the line at posing nude? I'll never say never, but thus far I've stayed on the artist side of the easel. I keep bumping up against that last requirement: a willingness to be vulnerable in front of others. No matter how I parse it, I can't seem to get past it. I admit this with some relief. As a writer, I expose enough of myself on the page; some things I just don't want to share.

But I'm grateful to those who can and do share their bodies — Alan, Brianna, Emily, Ivan and MacKenzie, and the dozens of anonymous people, past and future, whose willingness to be vulnerable means that I can keep drawing lines on paper, in pursuit of turning the human body in art.



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## A Play

## ***Because He Liked to Look at Me ... Vagina Monologue***

This excerpt from the *Vagina Monologues* was based on an interview with a woman who had a good experience with a man.

This is how I came to love my vagina. It's embarrassing because it's not politically correct. I mean I know it should have happened in a bath with salt grains from the Dead Sea, Enya playing, me loving my woman self. I know the story. Vaginas are beautiful. Our self-hatred is only the internalized repression and hatred of the patriarchal culture. It isn't real. Pussies Unite. I know all of it. Like if we'd grown up in a culture where we were taught fat thighs were beautiful, we'd all be pounding down milkshakes and Krispy Kremes, lying on our backs, spending our days thigh-expanding. But, we didn't grow up in that culture. I hated my thighs and I hated my vagina even more. I thought it was incredibly ugly. I was one of those women who had looked at it and from that moment on I wished I hadn't. It made me sick. I pitied anyone who had to go down there.

In order to survive, I began to pretend there was something else between my legs. I imagined furniture — cozy futons with light cotton comforters, little velvet settees, leopard rugs, or pretty things — silk handkerchiefs, quilted pot holders, or place settings. I got so accustomed to this that I lost all memory of having a vagina. Whenever a man was inside me, I pictured him inside a minklined muffler, or a Chinese bowl.

Then I met Bob. Bob was the most ordinary man I ever met. He was thin and tall and nondescript and wore khaki tan clothes. Bob did not like spicy foods or listen to Prince. He had no interest in sexy lingerie. In the summer he spent time in the shade. He did not share his inner feelings. He did not have any problems or issues and was not even an alcoholic. He wasn't very funny or articulate or mysterious. He wasn't mean or unavailable. He wasn't self-involved or charismatic. He didn't drive fast. I didn't particularly like Bob. I would have missed him altogether if he hadn't picked up my change that I dropped on the deli floor. When he handed me back my quarters and pennies and his hand accidentally touched mine, something happened. I went to bed with him. That's when the miracle occurred.

Turned out that Bob loved vaginas. He was a connoisseur. He loved the way they felt, the way they tasted, the way they smelled, but most importantly he loved the way they looked. He had to look at them.

The first time we had sex, he told me he had to see me.

"I'm right here," I said.

"No, you," he said. "I have to see you."

"Turn on the light," I said, thinking he was a weirdo and freaking out in the dark.

He turned on the light. Then he said, "OK, I'm ready, ready to see you."

“Right here,” I waved, “I’m right here.” Then he began to undress me. “What are you doing Bob?” I said.

“I need to see you,” he replied.

“No need,” I said. “Just do it.”

“I need to see what you look like,” he said.

“But you’ve seen a red leather couch before,” I said.

Bob continued. He would not stop. I wanted to throw up and die. “This is awfully intimate,” I said. “Can’t you just do it.”

“No,” he said. “It’s who you are. I need to look.”

I held my breath. He looked and looked. He got breathy and his face changed. He didn’t look ordinary anymore. He looked like a hungry beast.

“You’re so beautiful,” he said. “You’re elegant and deep and innocent and wild.”

“You saw that there?” I said. It was like he read my palm. “I saw that,” he said, “and more, much ... much ... more.”

He stayed looking for almost an hour as if he were studying a map, observing the moon, staring into my eyes, but it was my vagina. In the light I watched him looking at me and he was so genuinely excited, so peaceful and euphoric, I began to get wet and turned on. I began to see myself the way he saw me. I began to feel beautiful and delicious — like a great painting, or a waterfall. Bob wasn't afraid. He wasn't grossed out. I began to swell, began to feel proud. Began to love my vagina.

And Bob, lost himself there, and I was there with him, in my vagina, and we were both gone .... together.

## ***Fifty Girls' First Thoughts after Seeing an Erection***

*Girls, what did you think when you saw an erect penis for the first time?*

1. I was eight and my younger brother let me and our younger sister sneak a peek. When we saw what he looked like we couldn't stop giggling.



2. ‘Before I saw one I’d assumed a penis became erect still pointing down. I’d never seen any pictures, I imagined that sex would be an awkward encounter. When I was fourteen I saw my first erection and it was pointing straight up. It was a boy in my class who had come to my birthday party. We were playing truth or dare and he chose dare. He had to stand up and show us girls his penis. “Ohhhhhh that totally makes sense now!”’

3. 'I was confused because the typical boy drawings in biology books are very misleading. Before, I always thought that boy's balls were in two separate sacks. Now I have seen the real thing and know how it is for real!



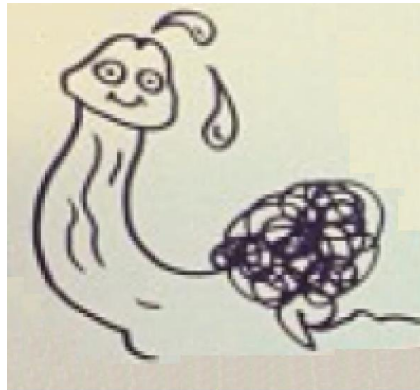
**Herbert List, Little Brother, 1953**

4. It was when I was thirteen. My parents let me babysit my next door neighbor's 5 year old daughter and one year old son for a few hours as they went out for a romantic evening. They told me the baby had been fed and changed and he would sleep through the night. At around ten he started to cry and his sister got up and told me 'I will have to change him.' I had never changed a baby's diapers before. Lucky for me he had just peed. My mother



had to come over and show me how to do this. OMG ... so that's what a boy looks like. It was then that my mother sat me down and told me about the birds and the bees for the second time. I had been having my period for some time and so it was time for her to tell me the other half of the story ... all about boys. Then she left me there all by myself, imaging what boys do to girls. So ... I went to have another look. It seemed so small and so soft. His little sis 'caught me in the act.' I was so embarrassed. Then she did sometime I will never forget. She took her little finger and ran it up and down his penis and voila ... it was no longer small and soft. Then she turned to me and said ... "I know he likes that ... isn't it beautiful!" I let her stay up until her parents got home ... in case the baby cried again.

5. 'When I was 18, I walked in on my roommate's naked boyfriend. It was summer and he was taking a nap, naked on her bed. When I saw his thing sticking out, I thought, how is **that** going to fit inside me?!'"



6. 'I grew up with five older and very protective brothers. I had seen their 'boners' more time than you can imagine. It was interesting to see how different they all are. Girls are all different too. One time when we were camping they decided to put the fire out 'a boy's way.' I was twelve at the

time and watched in amazement. They were all drunk on beer and didn't know I was watching. They thought I was fast asleep in my tent. Boys will be boys! '

7. 'My thought process went a little something like 'OMG I'm at least somewhat sexually arousing. I like this penis. Wait... he shaved. He was expecting this. I wanna touch it. Yup, this thing is great. And so soft. I have no idea what to do. Yup, this is fun.' Dicks are awesome.'



8. 'Hey, as I watched it ... it got much bigger!'

9. 'It looks like a creature from a horror film protruding from his crotch.'

10. 'Is that supposed to be hot? If so, I think it might be broken.'

11. 'I thought it would be way further down, like where a vagina is.'

12. 'It really does look like a lollipop, but it sure doesn't taste like one!'

13. 'Wait, is that what a boner is?'

14. 'Huh. So that's why I like girls more.'

15. I saw my baby brother's penis when I was a kid, if that counts. "WHAT IS THAT? WHY IS HE SO DIFFERENT?"

16. I thought it looked strange, then wondered what I was supposed to do with it. (I knew about the existence of hand-jobs and blowjobs, but I had no

idea how to give one. And being a virgin, I wasn't quite ready for sex.) And it felt nothing like I had expected. I expected it to be softer ...

17. Having a vagina all my life, I assumed that penises were in the exact same spot (ie between the legs) rather than a few inches below the belly button, where a girl's pubic bone would normally be. Obviously I hadn't considered the logistics of how sex works, but it was a crazy moment of discovery that everything I thought I knew about penises was wrong. Also, I still think they look funny. Here's a cartoon I drew about '*them*!'



18. I laughed. Not cruelly, but penises are funny-looking and it was flaccid cos we were just gonna shower with our swim suits on and he just whipped it out when I wasn't expecting it. Looked hilarious, plus I was pretty nervous and had a 16 year old girl's reaction to a wild penis randomly appearing.

19. I have older and younger brothers (I'm a girl), so a penis wasn't actually news to me. That being said, this comment was painfully accurate for a first time, although as I kept my poker face, I don't think it counts... Does it?

20. What could qualify as a genuine first reaction was when I saw a circumcised penis for the first time. I was like "Hah, that must hurt...". I made

the poor guy self-conscious for a bit (he thought I was referring to the scar), but then I explained I was actually referring to the glans being directly exposed to everything. I mean, I can't help but think how bad it'd feel if I didn't have my clit hood and tried to put on panties.



21. My first 'real-life' penis was a little small which was kind of nice because it was less intimidating than I had anticipated and I could fit the entire thing into my vagina. It was surprisingly firm and... like it had a life of its own. I didn't expect how much the throbbing would excite me.

22. My first reaction: good lord, how do you guys walk around with those things? Today it is much the same question.

23. First time I saw a penis in person, I was like “huh, that’s bigger than expected and looks way simpler than a vagina”. It was a pretty average-sized penis. It took some practice and research to figure out what kind of touching feels best. Also, I kept having to hold back nervous giggles over having an actual penis in my hand. I never thought a negative thing about it, but I’m sure laughing wouldn’t have gone over well, regardless of any explanation.



24. The first time I saw another person’s vagina was mind-blowing. I was all “holy shit, I have one of these and I had no idea.” I didn’t know the first thing about where my own clitoris was, but they’re like mini-cocks, they’re tough to miss. I also had basically never stuck anything in my own vagina before (barring the penis mentioned above) and found that it was not located as high up as I thought it would be, and it felt all sorts of interesting and bumpy inside. (And I very quickly learned that I needed to keep my fingernails short if I intended to go on touching vaginas.)

25. I was older, more experienced, and less nervous during vagina-time than penis-time, but I was still basically naive and clueless about how bodies vary and how pleasure works. I spent a lot of time just exploring and figuring things

out before anything actually got sexy, which was ultimately well worth the time for both of us.

26. The first time I really got to inspect a penis in person ... One of the more surprising things was seeing that testicles actually ascend upward and disappear at various times... (like right before ejaculation.) Sometimes he'd be about to cum and I would slow down and then push on the area right above his penis and his balls would go back down into the sack.

27. Internal dialogue: "Ok, there it is. It's exactly what it should look like....I think? Actually it's kinda gross. I don't really want to touch it. But I should offer to touch it. To not touch it would be rude. I'll just prod it gently. Why is he looking at me like I'm crazy? What...did he say grab it and squeeze? WTF I thought this was the most sensitive part of a dude's body! Won't that hurt him?!? I hope he doesn't try to grab and squeeze any parts of me like this. OK OW HE SUSPECTS MY ANATOMY IS RESILIENT TO EQUAL PRESSURE OW. How do I tell him to stop without being rude? Ow. I guess I'll just wait for it to be over and next time I'll tell...oh wait, that was it?"

28. In a sexual sense, I've always thought the penis and testicles look funny. I mean, it's a sausage and a squishy sack of balls hanging outside of your body that basically has a mind of it's own. On many occasions, I have asked my close male friends if they ever sit on themselves or if they smack against their legs when they wear shorts. I've also asked if they just spin it around like a helicopter dick sometimes. Having a penis for a dude I know is as normal as having an arm but to me it's just so alien.

29. oh man this is awful but he was (very) small.... the first time I saw the whole thing I distinctly remember thinking "is that it?" on the flip side – the second guy I was ever with is probably only average sized but in compared to

the first guy he looked like he had Hagrid's hardest boner. My eyes were the size of saucers when he popped that beautiful cock out the first time.

30. I think I was around 10ish when I saw my brother's. I literally screamed then wanted to see more penises. My brother told all his friends and by the end of the month I had seen a dozen! Wow ... what a month!

31. I was sixteen at the time. It was actually a friend's and we weren't doing anything but just goofing off and flashing each other. I was surprised by how long it was. Looking back, he was probably 7 or 8 inches. Maybe because it was the first but I don't think I've ever seen a penis that long in person since.

32. I thought it was pretty cool. It wasn't as ugly as I feared, and I was so impressed that he could make it twitch. It was fun, and the head was a lot squishier than I expected. It was really weird but in a really good way.

33. I used to be terrified of penises. I didn't have brothers and I grew up super sheltered, not seeing a one eyed willy until I was already eight and ten years of age. Like even seeing my boyfriend getting a boner through his jeans freaked me out. Good ole anxiety. Now my current boyfriends dick can cuddle up to my vagina and I wouldn't even blush.

34. "I was most surprised about how velvety soft penises are, and THEY CAN MOVE!?!?!? Seriously, I stopped, sat up, and stared at his penis demanding he make it twitch because I actually couldn't believe what I was seeing."

35. "Being a girl I know there's only a small space between my clitoris and rectum, but for a guy it is smooth all the way from his penis to his rectum ... it's weird I always look for another opening a vagina but there's never going to be one."



36. “That guys don’t have two sacks. I thought the first guy I went down on only had one ball. Didn’t know they weren’t in separate sacks.”

37. “How the skin on scrotum move, like, when the balls are lowering or retracting I guess. It still blows my mind. It looks like a deep-sea mollusk. I remember the first time I got a really close, well-lit look at my boyfriend’s ball sack as the skin on it gracefully shifted in many directions at once. I was so awestruck by its independent motions. I had no idea that any part of a human body could move in this otherworldly manner.



38. The first experience I had with balls changed my life; I was like a caveman discovering fire. “How much fun the balls can be! Yeah, sure, the cock was awesome but the balls fascinated me coz they reminded me of squishy stress balls. You could see them moving around while he stayed motionless! I swear



the first experience I had with balls changed my life; I was like a caveman discovering fire.”

39. “How goofy it looks. I can’t imagine why guys send dick pics. Why would you want to show off something that looks so ridiculous? Seriously, just because it feels nice doesn’t mean it’s sexy to look at. I mean, I’m sure vaginas aren’t very pretty either, but I don’t hear complaints about unwanted vagina pics.”

40. “How hard penises get and how floppy and silly they are when soft. It just blows my mind they go from practically mush to a hard-on in 10 seconds. How soft dick is...Other parts of men skin is rough or callous but somehow. Dick is fucking baby-skin soft. I was like woahhhh! O\_\_\_O”



41. “They’re always yanking on these things like they’re gonna rip them clean off, then when I touch it, it feels so damn delicate and I’m told to be gentle....”

42. “This is dumb but I was surprised at what balls actually looked like. Because of the drawings of penises that people always drew, I assumed there were two little sacks of testicles hanging of either side of the penis, not one sack with two testicles in them, if that makes sense.”

43. “My first time was a game of I’ll show you mine if you show me yours when I was around 5 years old. The boy was not circumcised. 12 years later, I was losing my virginity. The boy was circumcised. I had no idea what circumcision was, so I assumed that the difference in appearance was due to some sort of change that happens due to puberty. The next 3 dicks I saw were all circumcised. Until, the 4th dick I saw was uncircumcised. I didn’t want to embarrass him by mentioning it and spent months believing that he had an adult-sized child dick. I privately wondered what went wrong with his puberty. One day after we broke up, I mentioned it to a girlfriend, and was educated on circumcision. Felt like an idiot.”

44. “Penises are so soft! And velvety. And fun to play with. I once saw my baby brother’s thingy. He had a buried one. And they had to do surgery to draw it out. I did not know he was not ‘normal’ when I saw it for the first time. My mother had plunked him into the bath with me (I was four at the time). I thought all boys looked like that. Then I saw him after his surgery and realized that they had to give his little thingy a pull to take it out of its hiding place. Now he is a happy two year old and sometimes runs around with nothing, on proud of who he now is.

45. “Have you ever just watched balls relax and contract while your boyfriend is lying down after sex? It’s so fascinating. I just want to poke them and play with them. The first time I touched an erect penis was through my ex’s skinny jeans when I was 14. It actually felt like wood! Freaked me right out.”

46. “The size difference between soft and hard dick. It went from ‘huh, cute, slightly disappointing, kinda looks like a pear’ to ‘oh’ to ‘that is SO not gonna fit’ really fast.”

47. “Penises are really really gross and ugly. To the point where I almost can’t have sex with the lights on because they freak me out.”

48. If you asked me would I want a penis, can I ask whether boys would want a vagina ... blood once a month and all that. Maybe I might want to stick a penis on my body and try it out for a month. I wonder what it’s like to push instead or being pushed around.



49. I wish boys could walk around with their penises hanging out. Then we girls could pick for ourselves, rather than the other way around.

50. If I had one ... I would spend my entire day playing with it. We girls play with ourselves more often than you can imagine. Do boys spend their days playing with their penises ... of course they do.



I bet it must be fun!

### **Female Preferences ... Women Prefer Circumcised Men ...**

In a survey where women were asked to rate their preferences when it came to different forms of sexual activity, a substantial majority of women overwhelmingly preferred men who were circumcised;

**For Intercourse:** 71 percent preferred circumcised men while only 6 percent said they preferred uncircumcised men;

**For Fellatio:** 82 percent said they preferred a circumcised penis while 2 percent said they preferred an uncircumcised partner; and

**For Manual Stimulation:** 75 percent favored circumcised partners compared with 5 percent who reported a preference for uncircumcised men.

In addition, 76 percent said circumcised penises were more attractive while only 4 percent said they preferred the look of an uncircumcised penis; a whopping 90 percent said the circumcised penis looked “sexier;” 85 percent said it felt nicer to the touch; and 92 percent said they felt it was cleaner.

Even women who had never had a circumcised partner said they preferred the way a circumcised penis looks. In another survey of 1,000 women, only 3 percent said they preferred the look of an uncircumcised penis.

## Canadiana

## ***Love Sonnets by Robert Norwood***

His Lady of the Sonnets (From the Sonnet Sequence)

### II

I Meet you in the mystery of the night,  
A dear Dream-Goddess on a crescent moon;  
An opalescent splendour, like a noon  
Of lilies; and I wonder that the height  
Should darken for the depth to give me light;  
Light of your face, so lovely that I swoon  
With gazing, and then wake to find how soon  
Joy of the world fades when you fade from sight.

Beholding you, I am Endymion,  
Lost and immortal in Latmian dreams;  
With Dian bending down to look upon  
Her shepherd, whose aeonian slumber seems  
A moment, twinkling like a starry gem  
Among the jewels of her diadem

### IV

My love is like a spring among the hills  
Whose brimming waters may not be confined

But pour one torrent through the ways that wind Down to a garden; there the  
rose distills Its nectar; there a tall, white lily fills  
Night with anointing of two lovers, blind.  
Dumb, deaf, of body, spirit, and of mind  
From breathless blending of far-sundered wills.

Long ere my love had reached you, hard I strove  
To send its torrent through the barren fields;  
I wanted you, the liliated treasure-trove  
Of innocence, whose dear possession yields  
Immortal gladness to my heart that knows  
How you surpass the lily and the

## V

Like one great opal on the breast of Night,  
Soft and translucent, hangs the orb of June!  
I hear wild pipings of a joyous tune  
Played on a golden reed for the delight  
Of you, my hidden, lovely Eremite —  
You by the fountain from the marble hewn —  
You silent as in dream, with flowers strewn  
About your feet—you goddess, robed in white!

Mute and amazed, I at the broken wall  
Lean fearful, lest the sudden, dreadful dawn



For me Diana's awful doom let fall;  
And I be cursed with curious Actaeon,  
Save that you find in me this strong defence —  
My adoration of your innocence

## VI

When from the rose mist of creation grew  
God's patient waiting in your wide-set eyes.  
The morning stars, and all the host that flies  
On wings of love, paused at the wondrous blue  
With which the Master, mindful of the hue,  
Stained first the crystal dome of summer skies;  
And afterward the violet that vies  
With amethyst, before He fashioned you.

And I have trembled with those ancient stars.  
My heart has known the flame-winged seraphs' song;  
For no indifferent, dreamy eyelid bars  
Me from the blue, nor veils with lashes long  
Your love, that to my tender gazing grows  
Bold to confess it: I am glad he knows!

## IX

Last night—or was it in the golden morn —

Once more I dreamed that I alone did fare  
Forth into spirit-silences; and there  
I found you not; my star was set! Forlorn,  
I sought the kindred company of worn  
And stricken souls—lost, sundered souls, who bear  
Old and avoided crosses with each care  
Woven together in their crowns of thorn.

Gods of the patient, vain endeavour, these  
Claimed me and called me fellow, comrade, friend,  
And bade me join in their brave litanies;  
Because, though I had failed you, I dared bend  
Before you without hope of one reward.  
Save that in loving you my soul still soared.

X

Last night I crossed the spaces to your side.  
As you lay sleeping in the sacred room  
Of our great moment. Like a lily's bloom.  
Fragile and white were you, my spirit-bride,  
For pain and loneliness with you abide,  
And Death had thought to touch you with his doom,  
Until Love stood angelic at the tomb.  
Drew sword, smote him, and life's door opened wide.  
I looked on you and breathed upon your hair —

Your hair of such soft, brown, translucent gold!  
Nor did you know that I knelt down in prayer,  
Clasped hands, and worshipped you for the untold  
Magnificence of womanhood divine —  
God's miracle of Water turned to Wine!

#### XXIV

I am all gladness like a little child!  
Grief's tragic figure of the veiled face  
Fades from my path, moving with measured pace  
Back from the splendour that breaks on the wild.  
High hills of sorrow, where the storm-clouds piled  
In drift of tears. Lo! with what tender grace  
Joy holds the world again in her embrace  
Since you came forth, and looked on me, and smiled.

Down in the valley shines a scimiter —  
A stream with autumn-gold deep damascened;  
And of the bards of day one loiterer  
Still lingers at his song, securely screened  
By foliage. Dear, what miracle is this.  
Transforming void and chaos with a

#### XXVIII

Companion of the highroad, hail! all hail!  
Day on his shoulder flame of sunset bears,  
As he goes marching where the autumn flares  
A banner to the sky; in russet mail  
The trees are trooping hither to assail  
Twilight with spears; a rank of coward cares  
Creep up, as though to take us unawares.  
And find their stratagems of none avail.

Accept the challenge of the royal hills,  
And dare adventure as we always dared!  
Life with red wine his golden chalice fills.  
And bids us drink to all who forward fared —  
Those lost, white armies of the host of dream;  
Those dauntless, singing pilgrims of the Gleam

## Alone in a Cheap Hotel in Paris



## Prose from the Past

## ***The Cosmological Eye by Henry Miller***

My friend Reichel is just a pretext to enable me to talk about the world, the world of art and the world of men, and the confusion and eternal misunderstanding between the two. When I talk about Reichel I mean any good artist who finds himself alone, ignored, unappreciated. The Reichels of this world are being killed off like flies. It will always be so; the penalty for being different, for being an artist, is a cruel one.

Nothing will change this state of affairs. If you read carefully the history of our great and glorious civilization, if you read the biographies of the great, you will see that it has always been so; and if you read still more closely you will see that these exceptional men have themselves explained why it must be so, though often complaining bitterly of their lot.

Every artist is a human being as well as painter, writer or musician; and never more so than when he is trying to justify himself as artist. As a human being Reichel almost brings tears to my eyes. Not merely because he is unrecognized (while thousands of lesser men are wallowing in fame), but first of all because when you enter his room, which is in a cheap hotel where he does his work, the sanctity of the place breaks you down. It is not quite a hovel, his little den, but it is perilously close to being one. You cast your eye about the room and you see that the walls are covered with his paintings. The paintings themselves are holy. This is a man, you cannot help thinking, who has never done anything for gain. This man had to do these things or die. This is a man who is desperate, and at the same time full of love. He is trying

desperately to embrace the world with this love which nobody appreciates. And, finding himself alone, always alone and unacknowledged, he is filled with a black sorrow.

He was trying to explain it to me the other day as we stood at a bar. It's true, he was a little under the weather and so it was even more difficult to explain than normally. He was trying to say that what he felt was worse than sorrow, a sort of sub-human black pain which was in the spinal column and not in the heart or brain. This gnawing black pain, though he didn't say so, I realized at once was the reverse of his great love: it was the black unending curtain against which his gleaming pictures stand out and glow with a holy phosphorescence. He says to me, standing in his little hotel room: "I want that the pictures should look back at me; if I look at them and they don't look at me too then they are no good." The remark came about because some one had observed that in all his pictures there was an eye, the cosmological eye, this person said. As I walked away from the hotel I was thinking that perhaps this ubiquitous eye was the vestigial organ of his love so deeply implanted into everything he looked at that it shone back at him out of the darkness of human insensitivity. More, that this eye had to be in everything he did or he would go mad. This eye had to be there in order to gnaw into men's vitals, to get hold of them like a crab, and make them realize that Hans Reichel exists.

This cosmological eye is sunk deep within his body. Everything he looks at and seizes must be brought below the threshold of consciousness, brought deep into the entrails where there reigns an absolute night and where also the tender little mouths with which he absorbs his vision eat away until only the



quintessence remains. Here, in the warm bowels, the metamorphosis takes place. In the absolute night, in the black pain hidden away in the backbone, the substance of things is dissolved until only the essence shines forth. The objects of his love, as they swim up to the light to arrange themselves on his canvases, marry one another in strange mystic unions which are indissoluble. But the real ceremony goes on below, in the dark, according to the inscrutable atomic laws of wedlock. There are no witnesses, no solemn oaths. Phenomenon weds phenomenon in the way that atomic elements marry to make the miraculous substance of living matter. There are polygamous marriages and polyandrous marriages, but no morganatic marriages. There are monstrous unions too, just as in nature, and they are as inviolable, as indissoluble as the others. Caprice rules, but it is the stern caprice of nature, and so divine.

There is a picture which he calls “The Stillborn Twins.” It is an ensemble of miniature panels in which there is not only the embryonic flavor but the hieroglyphic as well. If he likes you, Reichel will show you in one of the panels the little shirt which the mother of the stillborn twins was probably thinking of in her agony. He says it so simply and honestly that you feel like weeping. The little shirt embedded in a cold pre-natal green is indeed the sort of shirt which only a woman in travail could summon up. You feel that with the freezing torture of birth, at the moment when the mind seems ready to snap, the mother’s eye inwardly turning gropes frantically towards some tender, known object which will attach her, if only for a moment, to the world of human entities. In this quick, agonized clutch the mother sinks back, through worlds unknown to man, to planets long since disappeared, where

perhaps there were no baby's shirts but where there was the warmth, the tenderness, the mossy envelope of a love beyond love, of a love for the disparate elements which metamorphose through the mother, through her pain, through her death, so that life may go on. Each panel, if you read it with the cosmological eye, is a throw-back to an undecipherable script of life. The whole cosmos is moving back and forth through the sluice of time and the stillborn twins are embedded there in the cold pre-natal green with the shirt that was never worn.

When I see him sitting in the armchair in a garden without bounds I see him dreaming backward with the stillborn twins. I see him as he looks to himself when there is no mirror anywhere in the world: when he is caught in a stone trance and has to imagine the mirror which is not there. The little white bird in the corner near his feet is talking to him, but he is deaf and the voice of the bird is inside him and he does not know whether he is talking to himself or whether he has become the little white bird itself. Caught like that, in the stony trance, the bird is plucked to the quick. It is as though the idea, bird, was suddenly arrested in the act of passing through the brain. The bird and the trance and the bird in the trance are transfixed. It shows in the expression on his face. The face is Reichel's, but it is a Reichel that has passed into a cataleptic state. A fleeting wonder hovers over the stone mask. Neither fear nor terror is registered in his expression—only an inexpressible wonder, as though he were the last witness of a world sliding down into darkness. And in this last minute vision the little white bird comes to speak to him—but he is already deaf. The most miraculous words are being uttered inside him, this bird language which no one has ever understood; he has it now, deep inside

him. But it is at this moment when everything is clear that he sees with stony vision the world slipping away into the black pit of nothingness.

There is another self-portrait—a bust which is smothered in a mass of green foliage. It's extraordinary how he bobs up out of the still ferns, with a more human look now, but still drunk with wonder, still amazed, bedazzled and overwhelmed by the feast of the eye. He seems to be floating up from the paleozoic ooze and, as if he had caught the distant roar of the Flood, there is in his face the premonition of impending catastrophe. He seems to be anticipating the destruction of the great forests, the annihilation of countless living trees and the lush green foliage of a spring which will never happen again. Every variety of leaf, every shade of green seems to be packed into this small canvas. It is a sort of bath in the vernal equinox, and man is happily absent from his preoccupations. Only Reichel is there, with his big round eyes, and the wonder is on him and this great indwelling wonder saturates the impending doom and casts a searchlight into the unknown.

In every cataclysm Reichel is present. Sometimes he is a fish hanging in the sky beneath a triple-ringed sun. He hangs there like a God of Vengeance raining down his maledictions upon man. He is the God who destroys the fishermen's nets, the God who brings down thunder and lightning so that the fishermen may be drowned. Sometimes he appeals incarnated as a snail, and you may see him at work building his own monument. Sometimes he is a gay and happy snail crawling about on the sands of Spain. Sometimes he is only the dream of a snail, and then his world already phantasmagorical becomes musical and diaphanous. You are there in his dream at the precise moment

when everything is melting, when only the barest suggestion of form remains to give a last fleeting due to the appearance of things. Swift as flame, elusive, perpetually on the wing, nevertheless there is always in his pictures the iron claw which grasps the unseizable and imprisons it without hurt or damage. It is the dexterity of the master, the visionary clutch which holds firm and secure its prey without ruffling a feather.

There are moments when he gives you the impression of being seated on another planet making his inventory of the world. Conjunctions are recorded such as no astronomer has noted. I am thinking now of a picture which he calls "Almost Full Moon." The almost is characteristic of Reichel. This almost full is not the almost full with which we are familiar. It is the almost-full-moon which a man would see from Mars, let us say. For when it will be full, this moon, it will throw a green, spectral light reflected from a planet just bursting into life. This is a moon which has somehow strayed from its orbit. It belongs to a night studded with strange configurations and it hangs there taut as an anchor in an ocean of pitchblende. So finely balanced is it in this unfamiliar sky that the addition of a thread would destroy its equilibrium. This is one of the moons which the poets are constantly charting and concerning which, fortunately, there is no scientific knowledge. Under these new moons the destiny of the race will one day be determined. They are the anarchic moons which swim in the latent protoplasm of the race, which bring about baffling disturbances, angoisse, hallucinations. Everything that happens now and has been happening for the last twenty thousand years or so is put in the balance against this weird, prophetic cusp of a moon which is traveling towards its optimum.

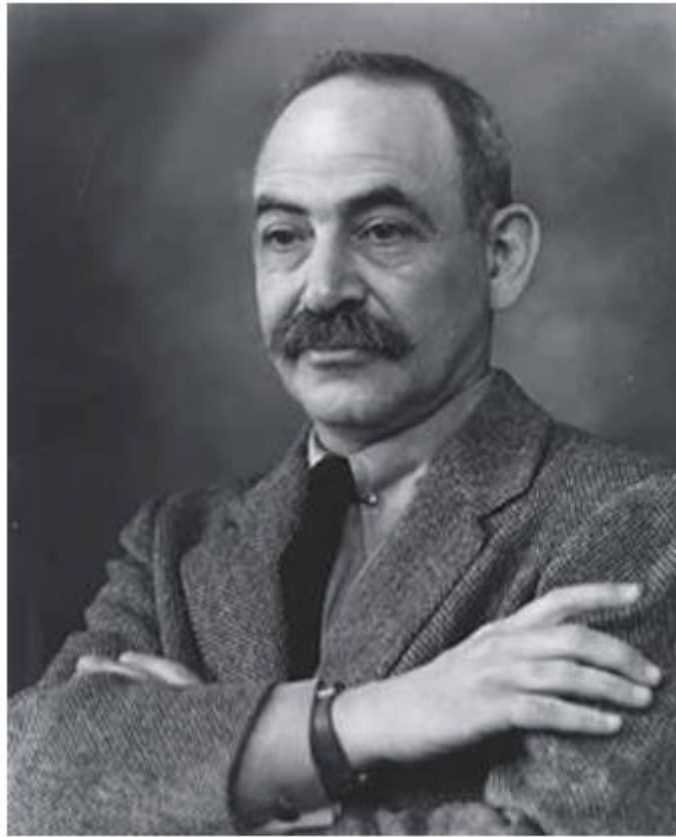
The moon and the sea! What cold, clean attractions obsess him! That warm, cosy fire out of which men build their petty emotions seems almost unknown to Reichel. He inhabits the depths, of ocean and of sky. Only in the depths is he content and in his element. Once he described to me a Medusa he had seen in the waters of Spain. It came swimming towards him like a sea-organ playing a mysterious oceanic music. I thought, as he was describing the Medusa, of another painting for which he could not find words. I saw him make the motion with his arms, that helpless, fluttering stammer of the man who has not yet named everything. He was almost on the point of describing it when suddenly he stopped, as if paralyzed by the dread of naming it. But while he was stuttering and stammering I heard the music playing; I knew that the old woman with the white hair was only another creature from the depths, a Medusa in female guise who was playing for him the music of eternal sorrow. I knew that she was the woman who inhabited “The Haunted House” where in hot somber tones the little white bird is perched, warbling the pre-ideological language unknown to man. I knew that she was there in the “Remembrance of a Stained Glass Window,” the being which inhabits the window, revealing herself in silence only to those who have opened their hearts. I knew that she was in the wall on which he had painted a verse of Rilke’s, this gloomy, desolate wall over which a smothered sun casts a wan ray of light. I knew that what he could not name was in everything, like his black sorrow, and that he had chosen a language as fluid as music in order not to be broken on the sharp spokes of the intellect.

In everything he does color is the predominant note. By the choice and blend of his tones you know that he is a musician, that he is preoccupied with what is unseizable and untranslatable. His colors are like the dark melodies of César Franck. They are all weighted with black, a live black, like the heart of chaos itself. This black might also be said to correspond to a kind of beneficent ignorance which permits him to resuscitate the powers of magic. Everything he portrays has a symbolic and contagious quality: the subject is but the means for conveying a significance which is deeper than form or language. When I think, for example, of the picture which he calls "The Holy Place," one of his strikingly unobtrusive subjects, I have to fall back on the word enigmatic. There is nothing in this work which bears resemblance to other holy places that we know of. It is made up of entirely new elements which through form and color suggest all that is called up by the title. And yet, by some strange alchemy, this little canvas, which might also have been called "Urim and Thummim," revives the memory of that which was lost to the Jews upon the destruction of the Holy Temple. It suggests the fact that in the consciousness of the race nothing which is sacred has been lost, that on the contrary it is we who are lost and vainly seeking, and that we shall go on vainly seeking until we learn to see with other eyes.

In this black out of which his rich colors are born there is not only the transcendental but the despotic. His black is not oppressive, but profound, producing a fruitful disquietude. It gives one to believe that there is no rock bottom any more than there is eternal truth. Nor even God, in the sense of the Absolute, for to create God one would first have to describe a circle. No, there is no God in these paintings, unless it be Reichel himself. There is no need for

a God because it is all one creative substance born out of darkness and relapsing into darkness again

***Before Paris and After by Julian Levi***



Julian Levi (1900 – 1982), circa 1950

I find it rather difficult to write about my own painting. Briefly, I am seeking an integration between what I feel and what I have learned by objective criteria; an integration between the tired experienced eye and the childlike simple perception; but above all I hope to resolve the polarity which exists between an essentially emotional view of nature and a classical, austere sense of design. "In truth, I have fainted by opening my eyes day and night on the perceptible world, and also by closing them from time to time that I might better see the vision blossom and submit itself to orderly arrangement." This



quotation from an article by Georges Rouault, which appeared in *Verve*, is to me rich in meaning and summarizes, with Gallic brevity, precisely what I have been driving at.

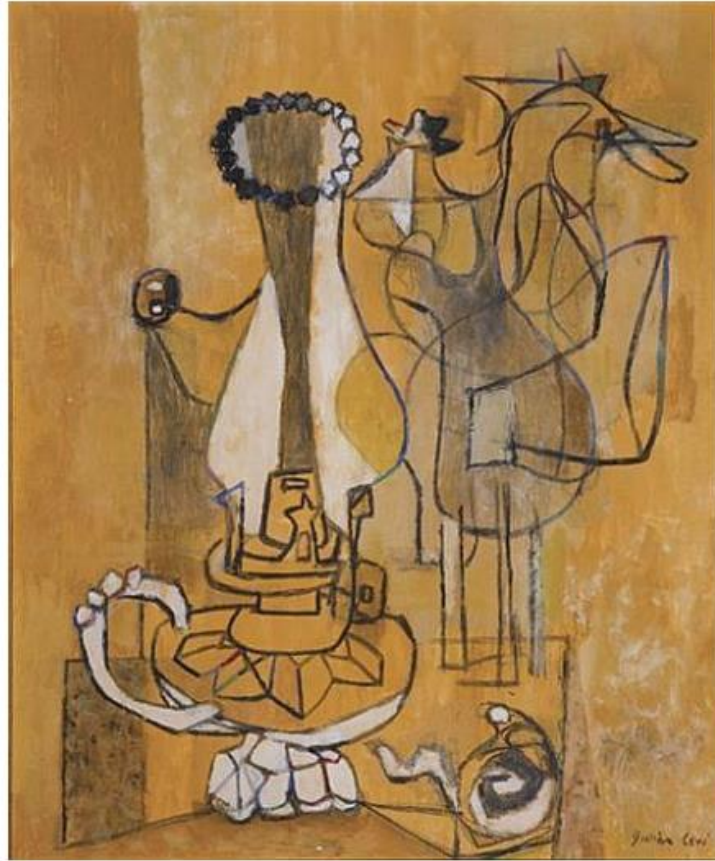
It seems to me that almost every artist finds some subdivision of nature or experience more congenial to his temperament than any other. To me it has been the sea or rather those regions adjacent to the sea beaches, dunes, swampy coasts. I haven't the space to go into the roots of this particular nostalgia but it has been part of my life since early childhood.



Poseidon, Oil on Canvas

As a secondary interest, I cherish the human physiognomy, the painting of people who, for diverse reasons, I find arresting. I seldom find my models

among people of superlative beauty or symmetry. I am often fascinated by "brats" of eight or nine with stringy hair and querulous expressions ...



Still Life, Oil on Canvas

In painting the sea coast I have tried to acquire as much objective knowledge of the subject as I possibly could. I know the people of those regions and I have become reasonably familiar with their activities. I have studied their fishing gear, their boats and assorted paraphernalia. I have learned how to sail (very badly, I regret to say) and the techniques of professional fishing. I don't lay great stress on the necessity of this kind of documentation but it does give me the feeling of being more closely related to what I have chosen to paint.

There is another aspect of an artist's choice of his subject matter which I think could be profitably explored. It is that I believe he is affectively related to certain forms and designs. I believe his choice is channeled by the compulsion to find an objective vehicle for inward plastic images.

I certainly do not know why, but I am stirred by certain geometrical relationships, certain rectangular forms and arabesques out of which grow particular harmonies and rhythms.

In deciding what subject I shall paint I am irresistibly drawn to objects which contain the skeleton of this type of plastic structure. Whether I am spending the summer on Barnegat Bay or on Cape Cod or merely sketching along the Harlem River, I somehow contrive to find the exact set of lines and contours which this inner appetite demands.

I try to remember that painting at its best is a form of communication; that it is constantly reaching out to find response from an ideal and sympathetic audience.



Barnegat, 1936 watercolor on paper

This I know is not accomplished by pictorial rhetoric nor by the manipulation of seductive paint surfaces.

Nor is a good picture concocted out of theatrical props, beautiful subjects, or memories of other paintings.

All these might astound but they will never communicate the emotional content or exaltation of life, which I believe an artist, by definition, has to accept as his task.





Leviathan, 1960, Oil on Canvas



Synthesis, Oil on Canvas

## ***Remembering Hart Crane by Malcolm Cowley***



Some years ago in the *New Republic*, I told how Hart Crane used to write his poems. But since the poems are still being read, nine years after his suicide, in April, 1932, and since the meaning of his life is still being argued about, the story is worth repeating in more detail.

There would be a Sunday afternoon party on Tory Hill, near Patterson, New York, in Slater Brown's unpainted and un-remodeled farmhouse. I can't remember any of the jokes that were made, or why we laughed at them so hard; I can remember only the general atmosphere of youth and poverty and

high spirits. Hart would be laughing twice as hard as the rest of us in the big, low-ceilinged kitchen; he would be drinking twice as much hard cider and contributing more than his share of the crazy metaphors and overblown epithets. Gradually he would fall silent and a little later we would find that he had disappeared. In lulls that began to interrupt the laughter, now Hart was gone, we would hear a new hubbub through the walls of the next room the phonograph playing a Cuban rumba, the typewriter clacking simultaneously; then the phonograph would run down and the typewriter stops while Hart changed the record, perhaps to a torch song, perhaps to Ravel's "Bolero." Sometimes he stamped across the room, declaiming to the four walls and the slow spring rain.

An hour later, after the rain had stopped, he would appear in the kitchen or on the croquet court, his face brick-red, his eyes burning, his already iron-gray hair bristling straight up from his skull. He would be chewing a five cent cigar which he had forgotten to light. In his hands would be two or three sheets of typewritten manuscript, with words crossed out and new lines scrawled in. "Read that," he would say. "Isn't that the *grrreatest* poem ever written!"

We would read it obediently, Allen Tate perhaps making a profound comment. The rest of us would get practically nothing out of it except the rhythm like that of a tom-tom and a few startling images. But we would all agree that it was absolutely superb. In Hart's state of exaltation there was nothing else we could say without driving him to rage or tears.

But this story, which I have told before, contains neither the real beginning nor the real end. I later discovered that Hart would have been meditating over that particular poem for months or even years, scribbling verses on pieces of paper that he carried in his pockets and meanwhile waiting for the moment of pure inspiration when he could put them all together. In his patience he reminded me of another friend, a famous killer of woodchucks, who instead of shooting at them from a distance with a high-powered rifle, and probably missing them, used to frighten them into their holes and wait till they came out again. Sometimes when they were slow about it, he said that he used to charm them out by playing his mouth-organ. In the same fashion, Hart tried to charm his inspiration out of its hiding place by drinking and laughing and playing the phonograph.

As for the end of the story, it might be delayed for several weeks. Painfully, perseveringly and dead sober Hart would revise his new poem, clarifying its images, correcting its meter and searching through dictionaries and thesauruses for exactly the right word. "The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise," in the second of his "Voyages," was the result of a search that lasted for several days; I was then working in the same office and can remember his roar of jubilation when he found the word "spindrift" in Webster's Unabridged. Even after the poem had been completed, the manuscript mailed to Poetry or the Dial and perhaps accepted, he would still have changes to make. In the formal sense, he was badly educated, having left high school before he was graduated and having filled his head since then with an assortment of sometimes profound but uncoordinated knowledge. He was not even very intelligent, in the conventional sense of the word; as a problem-



solving animal he was less than competent. But nobody I knew, and very few people in the history of literature, were willing to spend so much time in perfecting a single poem to the moment of what seemed to be absolute Tightness.

## ***Four Poems by Hart Crane***

### **Carmen de Boheme**

Sinuously winding through the room  
On smokey tongues of sweetened cigarettes, --  
Plaintive yet proud the cello tones resume  
The andante of smooth hopes and lost regrets.

Bright peacocks drink from flame-pots by the wall,  
Just as absinthe-sipping women shiver through  
With shimmering blue from the bowl in Circe's hall.  
Their brown eyes blacken, and the blue drop hue.

The andante quivers with crescendo's start,  
And dies on fire's birth in each man's heart.  
The tapestry betrays a finger through  
The slit, soft-pulling; -- -- -- and music follows cue.

There is a sweep, -- a shattering, -- a choir  
Disquieting of barbarous fantasy.  
The pulse is in the ears, the heart is higher,  
And stretches up through mortal eyes to see.

Carmen! Akimbo arms and smouldering eyes; --

Carmen! Bestirring hope and lipping eyes; --  
Carmen whirls, and music swirls and dips.  
"Carmen!," comes awed from wine-hot lips.

Finale leaves in silence to replume  
Bent wings, and Carmen with her flaunts through the gloom  
Of whispering tapestry, brown with old fringe: --  
The winners leave too, and the small lamps twinge.

Morning: and through the foggy city gate  
A gypsy wagon wiggles, striving straight.  
And some dream still of Carmen's mystic face, --  
Yellow, pallid, like ancient lace.

### **Forgetfulness**

Forgetfulness is like a song  
That, freed from beat and measure, wanders  
.Forgetfulness is like a bird whose wings are reconciled,  
Outspread and motionless, --  
A bird that coasts the wind unwearyingly  
Forgetfulness is rain at night,  
Or an old house in a forest, -- or a child.  
Forgetfulness is white, -- white as a blasted tree,  
And it may stun the sybil into prophecy,  
Or bury the Gods.

I can remember much forgetfulness.

## **Exile**

My hands have not touched pleasure since your hands, --  
No, -- nor my lips freed laughter since 'farewell',  
And with the day, distance again expands  
Voiceless between us, as an uncoiled shell.

Yet, love endures, though starving and alone.  
A dove's wings clung about my heart each night  
With surging gentleness, and the blue stone  
Set in the tryst-ring has but worn more bright.

## **The Broken Tower**

The bell-rope that gathers God at dawn  
Dispatches me as though I dropped down the knell  
Of a spent day - to wander the cathedral lawn  
From pit to crucifix, feet chill on steps from hell

Have you not heard, have you not seen that corps  
Of shadows in the tower, whose shoulders sway  
Antiphonal carillons launched before

The stars are caught and hived in the sun's ray?

The bells, I say, the bells break down their tower;  
And swing I know not where. Their tongues engrave  
Membrane through marrow, my long-scattered score  
Of broken intervals ... And I, their sexton slave!

Oval encyclicals in canyons heaping  
The impasse high with choir. Banked voices slain!  
Pagodas campaniles with reveilles out leaping-  
O terraced echoes prostrate on the plain! ...

And so it was I entered the broken world  
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice  
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)  
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.

My world I poured. But was it cognate, scored  
Of that tribunal monarch of the air  
Whose thighs embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word  
In wounds pledges once to hope - cleft to despair?

The steep encroachments of my blood left me  
No answer (could blood hold such a lofty tower  
As flings the question true?) -or is it she  
Whose sweet mortality stirs latent power?-

And through whose pulse I hear, counting the strokes

My veins recall and add, revived and sure  
The angelus of wars my chest evokes:  
What I hold healed, original now, and pure ...

And builds, within, a tower that is not stone  
(Not stone can jacket heaven) - but slip  
Of pebbles, - visible wings of silence sown  
In azure circles, widening as they dip

The matrix of the heart, lift down the eyes  
That shrines the quiet lake and swells a tower...  
The commodious, tall decorum of that sky  
Unseals her earth, and lifts love in its shower.

## **Mathematics and Science**

## ***Using Nuclear Techniques to Determine Tree Origin***

by Patrick Bruskiewich

Director, Vancouver Academy of Advanced Studies

### **Abstract**

A significant percentage of trees that are harvested and brought to market are harvested without property authorization. These trees may be considered pirated. An estimate put that percentage of upwards of 40 % of all trees sold in the market place. There exists a need to trace trees using good scientific practice.

### **How to Trace the Origin of Trees using the Isotopes of Trace Metals**

Over decades different isotopic means were studied using the light elements to try to differentiate the origin of trees based on their Hydrogen, Carbon, Oxygen and Nitrogen content.

These techniques appear wanting when determining where trees come from. The author is convinced that such light isotope techniques will not yield useful results.

Trace metals that are generally accepted to be essential for all plants, namely copper (Cu), iron (Fe), manganese (Mn), molybdenum (Mo), nickel (Ni), and zinc (Zn). These trace metals are usually found in the plant's mitochondria.



There are also toxic metals, cadmium (Cd) and lead (Pb) found in some trees. In the case of nutrition, dissolved metal ion concentrations required inside the plant are usually higher than those in the soil solution, while in the case of detoxification, the opposite situation occurs. <sup>1</sup> The isotopic ratio of these elements within the tree is set by the abundances within the soils that they grow. The trace Metals can be extracted from the Mitochondria. Perhaps a simple means as pyrolysis can extract the trace metals in an inert atmosphere.

Different regions around the world sport different abundances of these trace metals. Of particular note are the elements Nickel-28 and Zinc-30 which have a number of stable isotopes: <sup>2</sup>

Isotope mass	Relative Abundance
58	0.681
60	0.262
61	0.011
62	0.036
64	0.009

**Fig. 1: Stable Isotopes of Nickel-28 and Relative Abundance**

Isotope	Relative Abundance
64	0.492

66	0.277
67	0.040
68	0.185
70	0.006

**Fig. 2: Stable Isotopes of Zinc-30 and Relative Abundance**

If we set a threshold for detection of 4 percent then we have two isotopes of Nickel-28 and four isotopes of Zinc-30 that we can assay when we may set out to determine where a tree originates from. This permits an eight-dimensional space for assay analysis purposes (2 x 4) and should be adequate to determine whether a tree in fact matches the harvest area. If a lower threshold for detection is set then we are in a higher dimensional space.

An added feature might be to also look at the toxic Cadmium-48 content of the tree. In terms of Cd there are eight isotopes, six of which surpass the 4 % threshold:

Isotope	Relative Abundance
106	0.012
108	0.009
110	0.125
111	0.128
112	0.241

113	0.122
114	0.287
116	0.075

**Fig. 3: Stable Isotopes of Cadmium-48- and Relative Abundance**

With the addition of Cadmium in the assay you are now in a sixty four dimensional space for assay purposes (2 x 4 x 8). In such a space correlations shall be evident.

### **Using Nuclear Techniques to Find Relative Abundances of Trace Metals**

Nuclear techniques such as mass spectroscopy, or a florescence technique, thermal ionization mass spectroscopy or pixe may be used to find the relative abundance of the trace amounts of the metals (Ni-28, Zn-30 and Cd-48) outlined in this paper. A model simulation of this technique undertaken by the author points to a better than 95 % ability to detect unauthorized tree harvest through random sampling of timber.

### **References:**

- 1) Andresen, E. et al, *Trace metal metabolism in plants*, Journal of Experimental Botany, Volume 69, Issue 5, 20 February 2018, Pages 909–954
- 2) The Isotopic abundances are taken from their respective Wikipedia pages.

## Deux Danceuses



## Poetry

## ***Two New Poems by Aki Kurosawa***

### **Are You Lonely Too ...**

It is hard to be lonely  
But it is easy to be alone.  
I am alone when I sit  
At my desk at work –  
a face in a crowded place.

I am alone sitting on a train  
Going to and from work  
When I get home from work at the end  
Of my day I am lonely –  
with no one to greet me,  
no one to ask ...

How was your day my love?

I am lonely when I fix my dinner  
And start to think – ‘what about  
Tomorrow?’ Will it be another day  
like today, or will it be different?

Sleep fills my life with the  
Imagined, and I step among

My dreams, who keep me company –  
well I guess not being lonely  
is just a state of mind  
even when I am alone.

Maybe I will dream of you?  
Are you lonely too ...

### **Someone I can Spend Time With**

I sometimes play a game  
And watch the eyes of the boy  
I am with ...

I place my hand over my heart  
in the V of my blouse  
and smile ...

Sometimes they look down  
and smirk like a hungry tiger.  
I then frown ...

And look at my watch and say  
'it's time for me to go' ... I don't want  
a hungry tiger

If his eyes stay on mine, I stay  
awhile and let my hand drop  
into my lap ...

Then I fuss with my dress a bit and  
watch his eyes. If he looks down, it's  
time to go.

If his eyes are still on mine  
I reach out with my hand  
and touches his

I know he is someone  
I can spend time with  
and be happy ...



## ***The Sex Life of a Queen Bee by Rose Lang***

Were life for me ...  
like that of a Queen Bee  
at the centre of a hive  
surrounded by consorts who live  
to please me, and nothing more ...  
and male concubines, bored  
most times except when I let  
them come close  
and let loose.  
In a frenzy of  
Sex ... sex ... sex ...

My consorts I have  
long ago made sterile,  
yet they do try  
in the own frenzy  
to let loose,  
but nothing comes from them  
but the buzz, buzz, buzz  
of xes ... xes ... xes ...

My concubines I tease  
because I want them to please  
me. All I want from them

is they dance with me when  
I am ready to mate, that they rasp  
and ravage me, so we can make  
billions of baby bees ...

Were life for me ...  
like that of a Queen Bee  
My life would be so  
much simpler ...

I could let my consorts  
xes ... xes ... xes ...  
as much as they please  
and not worry.

Then set out in search  
of a male concubine  
when I am ready to  
make a baby bee ...  
a baby me.

***When That Day Comes ... Beware! by William Webster***

Real men don't cry  
They just try to get by  
Through things ... but I  
Unfortunately let

People upset me ..  
Almost always.  
It is hard for me to see  
A way out of this play.

Perhaps I am not  
A real man but a boy  
Perhaps I am caught  
And I am just a toy.

To be played with.  
It's because I care  
About the truth  
And cannot bare

Looking the other way  
When something bad goes on  
Perhaps there will be a day  
When my conscience will be gone

And nothing will bother me  
Anymore – I will not care  
And look the other way.  
When that day comes ... beware!

## ***New Poems by Patrick Bruskievich***

### **Watching the Women Walk By**

The soft lap... lap... lap ...  
of the water  
reminded me of the soft  
frap ... frap ... frap ...  
of a woman, enjoying herself.

Until the roar of a speedboat  
made me think of a machine  
with batteries, and then  
the din ... dimmed into a hum  
then back to ...

The soft lap... lap... lap ...  
frap ... frap ... frap ...  
of the grand ocean waves lapping and  
frapping upon the shore.  
I was waiting for my women friends.

It was high tide –  
the moon was overhead  
dusk ... and here I was  
all alone on a bench

watching the women walk by.

Waiting for the sky to darken  
And the stars to light up the heavens ...  
Waiting for Cassiopeia, Virgo and  
Andromeda to come  
To keep me company.

### **He Loves Alone**

A Catholic man  
in his sixties  
hope to be a father.

He lives alone  
since his divorce  
many years ago.

He has women friends  
who know of his hope.  
They tell him, do not  
give up hope.

They look to younger men;  
youth may have beauty  
but not wisdom.

He has wisdom  
and looks like Henri Matisse.

So he takes to painting  
to create his children,  
one brush stroke at a time.

The women can sense  
his kindness and gentleness  
in his art.

He is making love to them  
with his paint brush.  
Still they stay away.

He loves alone.

### **Are our Lives an Oxymoron?**

It's our *only choice*  
for sure ...  
an *open secret* that  
each day we must  
trudge, trudge, trudge  
off to work!

Is this the meaning of our lives?

Isn't it forty two?

But what is the question?

Isn't it ... why we trudge  
to work. Here's a clue  
forty-two in binary is  
I O I O I O ...

It's off to work we go.

OMG ...

Such *deafening silence*!

Are our lives an oxymoron?

... are we *the living dead*?



## ***Something Biblical by Isabella Montsouris***

When I saw this picture  
I remembered my polaroid  
with my two best friends ...



But we had more courage ...  
We were not holding bags in our hands ...  
Nor had hair over our boobs ...

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## Art

***Two Pastels of a Dancer by Michelle***





## ***Reflections on Art School by Olivia Tasaka***

[**Montreal**] I was never somebody who knew what they wanted to do with their future. The question always terrified me, and I could never wrap my head around the fact that every adult in my life seemed to believe that by sixteen, I could feel anything close to excitement, much less certainty, when considering my career options. I've changed my mind dozens of times since high school, I've applied, accepted, denied, re-applied, re-accepted, denied... and two years after graduating, I found myself still at home, still not in school, and with no real sense of where I wanted to be. I was watching my childhood best friends approaching the end of their degree, working real adult jobs in the real adult world while I remained at the same cafe I'd been working at for three years, feeling just as directionless as I did when we all graduated high school together. I knew I couldn't continue like this, that the idleness and monotony that defined the last two years of my life was starting to tear away at my psyche. Most of all, I knew that art was what got me through it all: the months of isolation, the growing pains of having to make my own big, defining life decisions, and the sobering realization as we collectively lived through a pandemic that people don't seem to care about each other as much as I once thought they did.

It took me a while to seriously consider art school, despite the fact that I was painting almost every day and that art had been a central part of my life for as long as I could recall. I had been trying to force myself into a more conventional academic pathway, one that I felt was easier to explain to strangers and would warrant less remarks about how I'm not going to survive



in the real world. Yet it became clear to me after years of trying to mold myself into what I thought others wanted me to be that I am not capable of pursuing anything that I truly don't care for.



Within the span of a couple days, I decided to throw together a portfolio and applied to a painting and drawing program in Montreal. I had felt a calling towards this city for a while, as well as a desperate urge to leave Vancouver and experience something different, something other than the same roads and people and places that I had seen everyday for the last ten years. I finally felt ready to go to university, and more than anything I wanted to experience something other than my parents' basement and my high school coffee shop job. A couple months after applying, I was accepted, and in late August I found myself on a flight to Montreal, finally turning the page onto a new chapter in life, full of uncertainty, curiosity, dread, and excitement.

I struggled to really wrap my head around art school at first. This wasn't helped by the fact that despite moving halfway across the country to attend university, I took all of my classes alone in my apartment, painting a canvas while my professor prattled on, confined to a little rectangle on my computer screen. This wasn't the hands-on, in-person experience that I was promised, and it left me feeling a bit jaded. The subjectivity of our grading, the vague, open-ended nature of our assignments, the flexible deadlines...



it all started to feel more like summer camp than school, a summer camp that I completed entirely by myself, never once stepping foot into the school's visual arts building. I wasn't learning colour theory, or how to make an underpainting, or any of the technical skills that I was expecting to be



introduced to; rather, our assignments were almost entirely conceptual, as if I could submit almost anything and it would still be acceptable. I felt as though I wasn't progressing or moving forward in my art, nor in my life; I was stagnating, as I had been for two years, and moving halfway across the country to escape it simply forced me to face the fact that even a completely new environment could not fix me, not if I remained the exact same.

For a couple of months, I allowed myself to wallow in bitterness and succumbed to the misery of my expectations not being met. Perhaps I was to blame for my naive idealism about the future, about turning the page and advancing to a new chapter in life, somehow emerging as a different, changed, and better person afterwards. Perhaps my expectations were too high, and after all, how much of my experience was determined by my own apathy? Looking back on it now, I have to ask myself if my lack of interest in school was my own fault and not a symptom of circumstance. It's certainly easier to blame outside forces than it is to admit to yourself that you simply don't have the drive that you used to.

Embarking on my flight home back to Vancouver for winter break, I felt disappointed in myself for not becoming the person I hoped I would become, for not even really trying to. For allowing myself to coast through my first semester of university, completing everything that needed to be completed but without the passion or intent that I once had. I was painting for the sake of making a deadline, not for the sake of improving my practice as a painter. Nonetheless, a part of me wasn't ready to give up yet, and I knew that one semester of remote learning was only a brief introduction to what the next four

years of my life could look like. Back in my childhood home, surrounded by familiarity and no longer distracted enough to avoid introspection, I was forced to



take a more objective look at what my experience in university had taught me thus far. Two years of social isolation and avoiding academic spaces like the plague had sent me down a path of general apathy towards my future and everyone else's, yet I began to recognize that this hopeless nihilism had become rather damaging to my mental health and motivation. Besides, allowing my disappointment to fester and grow inside of me wasn't getting

me anywhere. I had to accept the fact that in order for me to appreciate art school, something had to change, and that change had to happen internally.



In late January, I found myself back in Montreal, still enrolled full time in art school, and slowly began to discover a lot more value in the courses that I once found obsolete. I was improving noticeably throughout each assignment, and recognizing developments within my own stylistic choices and technical skill level. The content of my courses didn't change much; rather, I started making a conscious effort to examine my progress over the last few months, to ask plenty of questions and to take my assignments seriously, not because

I wanted a good grade but because I wanted to expand and improve upon my art practice. I've realized in the last few months that art school is less about learning colour theory or how to shade a sphere and much more about grappling with your own intrinsic motivation, pushing the boundaries of what you consider your art style, and recognizing the true value and meaning that your art practice has in your life.

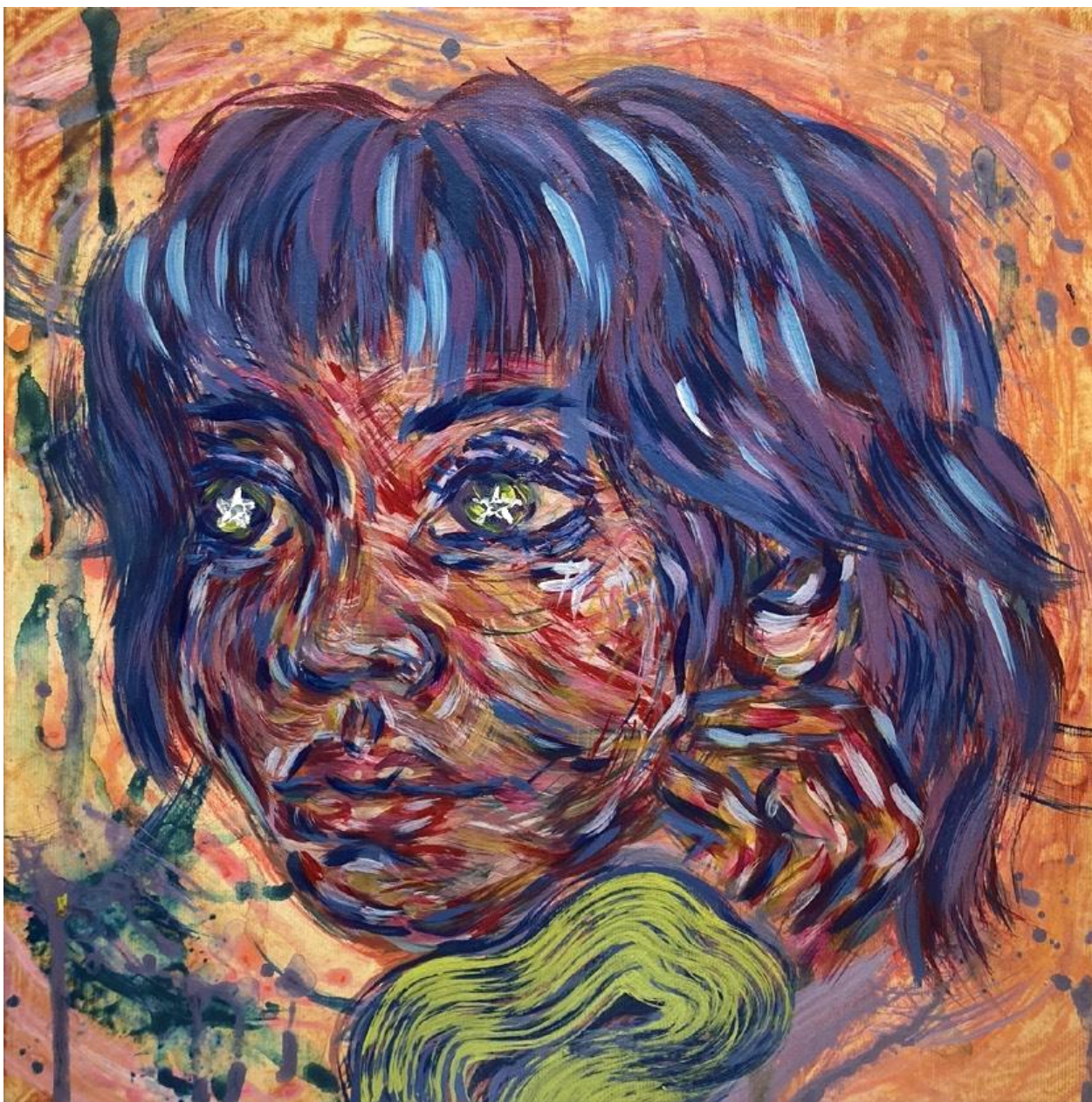
There would be nothing without art; I would be nothing without art. I recognize that now more than I ever did before, and in going to art school I reaffirmed this passion of mine and more importantly, forced myself to uncover the ambition within me that I wasn't sure I still had.



*Recent Other Works by Olivia*











## ***Boys and Their Toys by Aki Kurosawa***

My younger sister calls boy's penises their toys. She is a self-professed voyeur and enjoys watching boys play with their toys. Sometimes she also takes photographs of them ... These are some of her photos of their toys ...







## ***Self-Portrait by Aki Kurosawa***

I thought long and hard before I did a self-portrait. I am looking away so it is hard to see my face. But I thought you might be curious what I looked like.



This picture was taken by my sister when we were visiting my grandmother. I was asleep at the time. It was a hot and humid August afternoon.

My sister took this picture without asking me permission. But it is such a beautiful picture that I could not get angry at her. When I awoke, my sister said I was the most beautiful woman she knows. I blushed all over!

Here is a picture my sister took of me from behind a few months later.



It is at the little Onsen near my grandmother's village.

Here are pictures my sister took of me at two other Onsens near Tokyo



## ***Baring the Nipple in Protest***

[**New York**] About 100 people stripped naked in front of Facebook’s New York headquarters on Sunday (June 2, 2019), as part of a protest against what they view as censorship regarding Facebook and Instagram’s policies around artistic nudity.

As dawn rose over the city, the demonstrators lay naked on the road, each with large images of male nipples covering their genitalia.

People stripped naked in front of Facebook’s New York headquarters Sunday as part of a protest against what they view as censorship.

The protest — called #wethenipple — was organized and photographed by internationally-renowned American artist Spenser Tunick and the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC).

Members of women’s rights group *Grab Them By The Ballot* took part in the demonstration. The group said in a statement it was “challenging the censorship of artistic female nudity by Facebook and Instagram’s ‘community standards.’”

Facebook owns Instagram; CNN contacted both social media companies for comment, but had not received a reply at the time of publishing.

*Grab Them By The Ballot*’s mission is to “empower women around body positivity and encourage female voter turnout in 2020,” it said in a statement.

But the group's founder, Dawn Robertson, said the group has been censored by Facebook after posting artistic nude images of women.

Robertson said Facebook permanently disabled the group's ad account after it posted a nude painting with a celebratory poem for Mother's Day.

She said her personal account had also been banned six times after she posted artistic images of naked women. In correspondence seen by CNN, Facebook apologized and said it was "wrong" to have done so, but Robertson said she was later banned again.

According to Instagram's community guidelines naked images are banned on the site. "We know that there are times when people might want to share nude images that are artistic or creative in nature, but for a variety of reasons, we don't allow nudity on Instagram."

"This includes photos, videos, and some digitally-created content that show sexual intercourse, genitals, and close-ups of fully-nude buttocks. It also includes some photos of female nipples, but photos of post-mastectomy scarring and women actively breastfeeding are allowed," the policy states. Facebook says it restricts "the display of nudity or sexual activity because some people in our community may be sensitive to this type of content."

The social media giant's community standards say: "Our nudity policies have become more nuanced over time. We understand that nudity can be shared for a variety of reasons, including as a form of protest, to raise awareness about a



cause, or for educational or medical reasons. Where such intent is clear, we make allowances for the content.”

But Robertson told CNN there was little consistency in Facebook and Instagram’s nudity policy. “It’s like playing Russian Roulette,” she said. “I never know, when I post, whether they’re going to take it down.”

Robertson said she accepted that not all nudity was appropriate on social media, but said Facebook’s benchmark was “archaic.”

“Facebook is dictating how the world views the female nude body, and they’re treating it like it’s a crime and it’s shameful. Something has to be done. They have way more power than they should.”

### **Spenser Tunick – Controversial artist**

Tunick has made his name coordinating more than 120 large-scale nude photos in public spaces around the world, most recently a photo shoot in Melbourne, Australia, involving five hundred people on top of a parking lot for the city’s Provocaré arts festival.

He is no stranger to controversy, having orchestrated mass nude photo shoots since the early 1990s. Some of his more unusual installations have seen him coordinate shoots in the Nevada desert and the Dead Sea.

In a video of Sunday's shoot posted on Instagram, Tunick said "there is no reason for Facebook or Instagram to censor this video or block from hashtags."

In Tunick's native US, his work has proven especially controversial. The artist has been arrested on multiple occasions, and was the subject of a high profile clash between the US Supreme Court and former New York mayor, Rudy Giuliani, who disputed his right to stage nude photo shoots in the city.

Despite legal difficulties, Tunick believes attitudes toward nudity are liberalizing around the world. In an interview with CNN earlier this he even credited the growth of Instagram as a contributing factor.

"Nudity is part of our dialogue now — it's not so taboo," he added. "I think that's a great thing, but at the same time, it (can still be) dangerous to be nude in public because of laws against the body in public — for art and for nudity," he said.





Demonstrators bare nipples outside Facebook NY in protest of censorship  
New York, June 2, 2019

*{This is a reprint of an article previously published in 2019 by a local New York reporter}*

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## Novella

## ***On the Pedestal***

*“The greatest gift one friend can give to another is happiness.”*

This past July I was able to bring happiness in a rather unique way to a friend of an artist friend of mine. My artist friend’s friend was single, and enduring her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. Enduring perhaps is too light a word to describe her angst, for like most women who fret about their ‘biological clock’ the birthday girl was not happy with her present state of affairs. In fact it was her lack of affairs and the two long and lonely years since she had had a steady boy friend, or shared a bed with a man, that left her very despondent. My friend told me the birthday girl needed tender loving care, and a great deal of cheering up.

My artist friend understood this and took it upon herself to organize a very unique and special thirtieth birthday for her friend. This is where I came in. In the past I have sat as a figurative model for my friend the artist. She is a sculptor and quite a good one, specializing in busts and small figurines. She is from Russia and has lived in Vancouver for around fifteen years. She herself is in her mid-thirties, has a nine year old daughter and is separated from her Russian sculptor husband. They had met when they were both at art school in Moscow. He was the brash son of a middling Soviet painter and she was someone from a small Siberian town that was chasing her dreams. They had been married since she was eighteen. Their marriage had been a convenient one so that they could share a flat and get by on their meager artistic earnings. While they were married her Casanova husband had had a long series of flings with his artist’s models, a good fifty he had boasted to

me, and well, his most recent conquest had just bore him an illegitimate son. The two were now separated for a few months. A fling with a young and beautiful artist model was one thing; a baby was another thing all together. The model was a student at one of the art colleges and as a result the father of the baby boy was black-balled from teaching at that college, and for good reason. The model dropped out of the art college to escape the humiliation and the scorn.

As a sculptor, my artist friend does pottery, hand crafted clay figurines and the occasional pour of brass. She also does her own version of plaster of Paris, both miniature and life size fantasy figures, that express the whimsy of the female psyche. As a sculptor she cannot survive merely on ‘one-offs. There are just not enough patrons of fine art in Vancouver for any artists to survive with large and significant works of art.

There was no choice for her but to follow in Andy Warhol’s footsteps and live ‘*The Factory*’ mentality. My artist friend recently bought herself a second hand pottery kiln and has plans ‘to conquer the world with her product.’ She has made arrangements with stores down the Pacific Coast to sell ‘her product.’ She admits this is bad for the artist soul, but is good for the bottom line. She now has to provide for her family, for her Casanova ex-husband cannot.

This past year I had sat for my artist friend as she did a series of drawings of the Minotaur. I agreed to do this after she showed me some Minotaur paintings she had done in the Picasso style. If she hadn’t told me the Minotaur

paintings were hers I would never have known they were not by Picasso. Picasso had been her heartfelt inspiration when she was growing up in cold and barren Siberia, and at one time she had visions of following in his footsteps. However, four years at a Soviet style art college in Moscow had rid her of ‘*the bourgeois decadence of Picasso.*’ She could only rebel so much before they pulled her works from the college showings. Without showings an artist cannot become known. If they are unknown they die impoverished, forgotten and embittered.

My artist friend was not interested in martyrdom.

One day, out of the blue, and some weeks after our most recent drawing session, my sculptor friend texted me out the blue. Her text came on a Thursday evening around midnight.

When I receive texts so late in the evening I know something is up. If you have artists as friends you know that they are eccentric and quirky people. The text conversation went something like this ...

“Help! Can you sit for me this weekend?”

“Sure. What’s the panic?”

“Can you spare a few hours to sit at a friend’s birthday party?”

“I have never done anything like that before. Is it important for you?”

“Yes she’s a close friend. Please!”

“Sounds like fun. Tell me more.”

“It’s her thirtieth. She needs some cheering up.”

“How much cheering up?”

“Lot’s, she thinks she is over the hill at thirty.”

“Lol. Loin cloth or no loin cloth?”

“Loin cloth ... to begin with. ”

I smiled for a knew that while most drawing sessions started with a modest me, the artist’s tended to tug at the ribbons protecting my modesty and well, voila, Michelangelo’s David.

“If your daughter is there it has to be loin cloth.”

Her daughter was a precocious nine years old. When I had previously sat for my artist friend her daughter had kicked up a fuss, wanting to come and do some life drawing. Her mother and I both agreed it was not right to let her – she was far too young. I understand the nine year old took to using some of

her mother's life drawing books to assuage her feminine curiosity, and her artistic sensibilities.

"She's going to be at a sleep over at her friend's place."

"When the birthday party?"

"Saturday night, from 6 to 10."

"You sure left things for the last minute."

"Are you free?"

"I will have to rearrange some plans, but yes I am. Where is it?"

"Thanks. My atelier, where else?"

"Not at someone's home?"

"Lol. Maybe next time. "

"How many 'artists'?"

You might note that I paraphrased the word '*artist*'. I suspected there would be one artist and three rabbits – her and her three friends. What's a rabbit you



may ask? It is a soft furry animal, pink in all the right places, and with a sexual appetite.

“Four ... including myself.”

“What do you offer me in return?”

“Gulp ... What do you want?”

“A piece of birthday cake ... and a bit of fun.”

“You can have two pieces of birthday cake. How much fun do you want?”

“Be creative ... tickle my fancy ...”

“Then we are on?”

“Sure. What do you have in mind in the way of art?”

“We’ll do a sculpture ... naturally”

I smiled. The world naturally told me that the rabbits would be hopping and someone would tug at the ribbons.

“A sculpture of what?”

“Something classical perhaps.”

“Count me in.”

“Can you come by a bit earlier on Saturday?”

“When would you like me to be there?”

“How about five?”

“I work until four. I will try to be at your atelier around five thirty.”

“Spaciba.”

In case you are wondering, Spaciba means, it means ‘*thank you*’ in Russian. When I sat for her I asked her to teach me some Russian. I had learned perhaps a dozen words, spaciba being one of them.

When I received my artist friend’s text I was safely tucked into bed. I sleep *sans habillement* as the French would say. I set my cell phone down on my coffee table and turned over and tucked myself under the covers. Then, and only then did I realize I could not sleep on my stomach ... at least for a little while.

The thought of being an artist’s model at a birthday party like this gave me such pleasant dreams that night. In one of the dreams I swear I was a male

concubine to a rich princess. What did Sigmund Freud once say about the interpretation of dreams ... that they ultimately reflected our conscious angsts.

So began one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life. My artist friend texted me on a Thursday night and two evenings hence I was going to sit and be the inspiration for a woman's thirtieth birthday gift. And I needed a new loin cloth. Somehow I had mislaid the one I used when I last sat for my sculptor friend. I suspected I had left the loin cloth behind and her daughter had pinched it. The last time I sat the daughter happened into the atelier unexpectedly and had caught a glimpse of the backside of me, the cheeky little monkey. I had wondered how long she had been standing behind the partition before she barged in our drawing session. I also wondered if she had seen too much in profile.

The daughter had arrived uninvited and wanted to do some life drawing and was upset at her mother for not letting her draw. I had seen some of her daughter's artwork. She was an artist in her own right and I suspected she might one day in the not too distant future eclipse her mother given half a chance, but hers was a tender age for drawing life and well ... her mother did not want to get her interested in the birds and the bees just yet.

She had caught a glimpse of the best of me as I scrambled into my robe. I think I had set my loin cloth atop the robe and in the confusion it fell to the floor behind the pedestal. I can imagine the daughter serendipitously collecting it up as a trophy. But being a gentle soul, I thought it best not to

not to ask for it back. I also did not want to know why she wanted to keep it. I might day have the courage to ask her, but not today.

I spent Friday night getting ready for the birthday party by sewing a new loin cloth. Depending on the session there is a loin cloth for every occasion. If I am expected to move about and take crazy poses I normally wear a g-string, with a close fit, which I had bought at the store. It had spandex strings. A g-string is for modeling for an animation class, or doing the crazy academic poses. I can stay tucked into a g-string. If I am just sitting or standing about I feel comfortable in a loin cloth. A man has to be careful with a loin cloth lest something fall out – what do they call it – a costume malfunction.

That Friday night I sewed new loin cloths with red ribbons to replace the one that had been pinched by the artist's daughter. I sewed two that night in fact, for the first one I had made a mistake and it was not enough of a triangle and well, when I tried it on once I was a bit aroused, soft and immodest things started to pop out. The second loin cloth had a bigger triangle and more space and even when aroused I managed to stay modest.

The second one is the loin cloth I decided to wear at the birthday party. I did not see myself having to take crazy poses and I planned to stay modest, at least until the loin cloth was removed. With the more ample loin cloth I figure everything would stay tucked in. If the 'artists' wanted me less modest they could tug on the two bows on the red ribbons ...

On Saturday afternoon the clock crept through the afternoon. I managed to leave a bit later than expected for the atelier through no fault of my own. I was delayed by a few minutes at work, and then missed the bus I wanted to take by mere seconds. I had to wait fifteen minutes for the next bus into downtown. Just like watching a boiling kettle distorts your sense of time, waiting for a bus and the trying to rush across a major metropolis on a bus will do that as well. All I could think of while the minutes ticked away was will I ruin the birthday party if I arrive late? I texted my artist friend that I was on my way and not to fret.

Despite the difficulties of traveling across town at Saturday rush hour to her atelier near Commercial Street, I managed to get to there a mere quarter hour before the arrival of the guests and the start of the birthday party.

Taking the bus across town to Commercial means going down Hastings Street, and in particular through the intersection of Main and Hastings. That part of town is known as the Downtown East Side. It is poverty incarnate. I can't bring myself to look around at the abject poverty and so I tucked my nose in a pocket book I had brought for me just for that purpose. Things would be twice as bad later that night when I did the return trip. When the sun goes down the real monsters emerge out of the Downtown East Side.

I tried to take my mind off of this angst by thinking what lay ahead for me at the atelier. If you have ever sat as an artist's model you know that the clothes we wear day to day leave welts and impressions on our skin that take some time to disappear. For women it is the underwire on their brassiere, and things

like that. For men it might be the belt on our pants or the seam of our under garments. Men's boxers leave a welt around the belt area. Women have it sorted right when they wear g-strings. But if a man wore such a thing for more than an hour or two, his voice would go up an octave or two, and his chances of becoming a father would quickly diminish.

When I sit for an artist I undress and then wrap myself in a robe and stand or walk about for a good thirty minutes to rid myself of any unsightly welts or impressions left on my body. I also bring slippers. Most artist ateliers have cold concrete as the floor. Standing about helps to calm sexual energy. Nothing is more distracting to artists then when their male model is aroused. I found with experience that meditation and listening to classical music also does the trick. I knew to bring Mozart CD's to the atelier where I sit. I also drink tea to keep myself warm and to hydrate myself. Nervous energy causes one to lose body heat faster than normal when you are an artist's model. For the first bit of a session the adrenaline keeps you warm. The second half you can get through by sipping herbal tea.

Luckily I had arrived a quarter hour before the guests. Just before we were to start the session I skinnied into my loin cloth, wrapped myself in my robe and then took up position just behind the partition at the back of the atelier. I was shivering ever so slightly, but I did not know whether it was because the atelier was a bit chilly, or whether it was because I was nervous for what awaited me. I guess a little of both.

I only had to wait for a few minutes behind the partition for the guests to arrive. The three other women all arrived together a few minutes before six. From my hidden place I could clearly hear their voices. There was a lot of giggling and feminine energy. I spied the three women from my vantage point. Two of the three women were looking past my artist friend, while the birthday girl stayed focused on her.

The two other women were obviously in the know and were trying to sneak a peek at me. I decided to be a bit cheeky with them and pulled open my robe. I inched a bare leg around the edge of the partition. I undid the ribbon on that side of the loin cloth and slowly started to move my pelvis to the edge. I placed my hand over the best of me and then stood half aside and half behind the edge of the partition. Then I inched myself back behind the partition, and moved my hand away from the best of me in such a way that they were titillated but not gratified by my tease. I then put back on the loin cloth. For the next minute or so they would believe their model would start the session immodest.

When I had arrived I had seen that the atelier had been decorated for the occasion. There at the centre of the atelier had been placed the model's pedestal. On top of it was placed a tray of hors d'oeuvres which I knew would have to be moved if I were to stand there.

If the birthday girl suspected anything, I could not tell it by her voice. She had not seen me as I teased her two friends. It was easy to imagine that the three

women in the know were toying with the birthday girl when she asked “what are we going to do?”

“Be patient. You’ll find out,” they told her, with an edge of intrigue. Only a naïve innocent would miss the nuances of what might be in store for her when having a birthday party in an artist’s atelier.

The birthday girl was named Ruth. When I heard her name for the first time I had visions of a rather plain, big-boned kind of a girl who still tugged at her mother’s skirt. She looked exactly like that. She had long black hair and black eyes and wore a simple dress that did not in any way show her to be feminine. She also had that nervous energy that a Jewish princess has.

The other two women were named Jessi and Sophia. I had not met the two of them either. Before they arrived I imagined them to be less homely than Ruth, if only because I had been told they were both married. Jessi was a brunette with a big buffoon hairstyle and Sophia was a blonde with a Marilyn Monroe coiffure. I could imagine Jessi to be a Canadian girl, born and raised in Vancouver, and very much a product of her environment. Sophia looked very much a Russian girl with her blonde hair and blue green eyes. She spoke with a Slavic accent that went well with her Slavic dress and her Slavic airs. And my artist friend is, well, is my artist friend ... no names please.

It took a few minutes for the birthday girl to settle herself into the venue when Sophia produced a blindfold and told Ruth she was in for a *big birthday surprise*. With some pomp and ceremony Ruth let herself be blindfolded.



Then they took the hors d'oeuvres off the pedestal and I was ushered out of my lair. I walked around the partition and up to the base of the pedestal. It was only then that I took off my robe, gave it to my artist friend and stepped up into the light of day.

I hadn't expected to be so physical, climbing up on the pedestal, and well some of me popped out from under the loin cloth. This elicited a giggle from Jessi which caught Ruth's attention.

"What's going on?" Ruth asked, trying to peek from under her blindfold.

Jessi responded "be patient, you'll soon find out."

Sophia offered me her hand to steady myself as I climbed up onto the pedestal. Her hand was warm like mine and I smiled at her to thank her for her courtesy. She gave me a lovely smile back. Her teeth were perfect. She was admiring my little bit of immodesty ... if I indeed were a sculpture my two stones splayed out of the loin cloth ... She was blushing.

When I was safely atop the pedestal, and had tucked myself back into my loin cloth, I took up the pose of Michelangelo's David. Then Jessi removed the blindfold from Ruth who gave an astonished performance that I knew was sincere.

"Oh my God!" she exclaimed. "For me!"

“This is your birthday gift,” my artist friend said to Ruth as she pointed at me.

“What a marvelous gift,” Ruth said as they clapped her hands. She hugged her friends one by one. Then she turned back to look at me. “I have never had such a wonderful gift before.” When she said this for some reason I thought back to my dream of being a male concubine for a princess.

“Tonight the four of us are going to do a sculptor of Michelangelo’s David.” my artist friend continued.

“That will be so much fun!” Ruth was over the moon in her delight.

I was not looking down as Ruth said this, peering instead into the distance in an effort to disengage myself from the here, and the now. The first few minutes of an art session is always the most difficult even for an experienced model as they try to come to terms with their surroundings and not become overly stimulated.

Right from the beginning of the session I knew it was going to be hard for me not to be aroused. I started to stir under the loin cloth. It is hard to hide this from artists, especially if they are women. But these were not artists. Their appetites were there and the rabbits began to hop about the moment their indulgence was made known to them. Perhaps I was partly to blame for this because of the tease I had given Jessi and Sophia.

I hope the rabbits did not want to nibble on any carrots, I thought. I would try my best not to make them hunger for a nibble. Other men would probably let them nibble, but I am Catholic and I did not want to be too sinful in my life lest St. Peter take offence at some of my failings and shortcomings and bar my entrance into paradise.

I knew it was Ruth that would have the biggest appetite. After all it was her party and I was her gift. I could tell she could not wait to unwrap me, and take pleasure in me.

“This is simply marvelous,” she said.

“It is isn’t it,” Jessi agreed.

“We arranged him just for you ...” Sophia chimed. “We thought this would cheer you up.”

My artist friend harped “... he is my model and has helped me out ...”

“Helped you out,” teased Jessi. “Helped you out how I may ask.” She had a sly grin on her face. “Like his model helped your ...”

“Jessi!” my artist friend exclaimed, interrupting her. “He has helped me out by sitting for me a few times his year, so I could draw.”

“Have you slept with him,” whispered Sophia. I don’t think she expected that I could hear her question. I cleared my throat and Sophia looked up at me. I took that moment to adjust my loin cloth, given the four woman a brief glimmer.

“No I haven’t slept with him. Why should I?” My artist friend was angry being asked the question. “You should know better than to ask.”

“Well your Casanova ...” Sophia did not have a chance to finish her sentence. My artist friend had raised a finger at her to stop her. Then she put the finger to her lips and said “Shhhhh. I don’t want to be reminded what he has done.”

“Here,” I said. I handed my artist friend my robe and she hung it up on a hook on the partition.

“The model has a voice ... does he have a name?” Ruth asked.

I looked over at my artist friend before answering. “Tonight my name is David.”

I was not about to share my intimate details with this hungry rabbit. As a rule I separated my artistic life from my real one and tried to keep the two apart. I admit I have a few artist friends who visit me from time to time, but some, like the artist whose atelier I was sitting in, had not had as yet, a chance to visit me. In her case I wanted to stay at arm’s length lest either of us be

tempted to share a bed. Sex complicates friendship and I wanted to stay friends with this talented sculptor.

After hanging the robe she walked back to beside the pedestal. The three other woman were milling around the pedestal studying me intimately. I half expected one of them to reach out and touch me. There was an awkward silence of perhaps twenty seconds.

It was Ruth who broke the silence. “Does he have to ... you know ...” asked Ruth.

I glanced down at her and knew what she was thinking. She wasn’t staring at my face. She was staring at that part of me midway between my navel and my knees, modestly hidden away behind the small fold of the loin cloth, and held up by a simple red crimson ribbon with a bow on one hip and another on the other one. I stirred underneath the loin cloth and Ruth noticed that.

“What?” my artist friend asked even though she knew what Ruth was thinking..

“Does he have to wear that?” I was still peering down as Ruth pointed at my loin cloth. I stirred again.

“For now ... at least.”

Ruth smiled when she understood the import of *'for now ... at least.'* The birthday girl walked closer and now was nearly touching the pedestal with her hip. I could see her at the corner of my eye. She eyed the ribbons and passed her tongue hungrily across her lips. I swear she was wiggling her nose like a hungry rabbit.

I was wondering what she was doing standing beside me like that when I realized that she could probably see past the edge of the loin cloth and was trying to catch a glimmer of me. I moved my leg a bit, but not to hide myself but to tease her. Then I reached down to adjust my loin cloth pulling it away from my body for a split second so that she was titillated. From where she stood she probably thought me to be elephantine.

I heard a sigh from Ruth. It was the sigh of someone who knew they were so close to their desires, yet so far away from them at the same time.

I looked down at Ruth and swear she wrinkled her nose like a hungry rabbit again. In fact, the three women, Ruth, Jessi and Sophia all seem to be doing this from time to time as well. Perhaps it was my pheromones that caused them to do this. I could feel myself wet as a man aroused. Or maybe it was the pheromones of the three women themselves standing before their semi-draped model. I had already sat for my artist friend and so knew what I was all about.

My inner voice was telling me to tread carefully. The other three women wanted such intimacy as well, but not as an artist would with a model. In their

eyes I was not un objet d'art, but un objet d'amour. Their expectations were totally different, especially the birthday girl. God only knows what she expected of me! I grimaced and thought, 'it was going to be a long and most likely riotous evening.'

I have had long and riotous nights before while standing in as an artist's model. A few months back, to help out some artist friends, I had danced burlesque at a contest and won first prize. The burlesque routine was called *The Artist Model* and was performed to Gabriel's Oboe played by Yo Yo Ma. I had decided to be so bold not only on a whim but also because my artist friends were too proud to accept a gift, although they were too poor to begin with. They had just had a unplanned baby boy and well, their financial situation was dreary.

The day after I won the \$ 500 first prize dancing burlesque I gave it to the mother of the little baby and told her if she needed any more all she had to do was ask. The father of the illegitimate child was *il Casanova*. He was so angry with me for doing this that I was told me never to visit his studio again. "You have embarrassed me in front of everyone," he bellowed. Excuse me! He had embarrassed himself and in doing so wrecked his perfectly good marriage. How did I meet him? Through a friend who had sat for him for a figurative sculptor. She invited me to come and chaperone her as she stood for him (she literally was standing not sitting). Il Casanova was making moves on her and well she needed someone to distract him.

That where I came in. I agreed to sit for him as he did a bust of me and my hat from the shoulders up. That gave an out for my model friend who had gotten tired of his mischief. Things were fine until I gave the mother of his illegitimate son the \$ 500 prize money, quite publicly, and explained publicly how I had won it. To tweak his nose a bit that evening I also agree to stand as an artist model for a life drawing session in his atelier with the proceeds going to the little boy and his mother. At the end of the day my generosity earned her a total of \$ 750, the prize money and the proceeds from the drawing session. There were ten artists each of which paid \$ 25 to draw that evening – friends, friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends – who all knew the proceeds were going to a good cause..

In the way of a thank you the mother nursed her little baby at my feet as I stood above her *sans habillement* on the pedestal. I swore there was a halo around her angelic head. In response later that evening when everyone had gone home I understand il Casanova trashed my bust, and quite violently, later that evening.

Yes, my inner voice was telling me to tread carefully. I was deep in my thoughts and somewhere far away when I heard a voice ask “before we begin, who wants some wine?” It was Jessi who would serve as the wine wench. She poured the four women some Pinot Gris and then poured a fifth glass and set it at my feet on the pedestal. I smiled her a *thank you*. I did not want to bend down to pick up the glass lest I fell off the pedestal or worst yet fell out of my loin cloth, again.



Jessi brushed her hand across my foot. The other three women saw her do that. I did not say, or do anything. She was testing me and I was answering her in a passive silence. I did not even wince as some other models do when they are touched. I just gave her an even bigger smile. I felt goose bumps all over my body. There was now an understanding, that as their model I would give them some '*sculptor liberty*'.

What's a sculptor's liberty? When I sat for my artist friend the first time I found out that sculptors need to *study* the model by touching them from time to time. Sketch artists and painters had no reason to approach the model so intimately and so there was a wall between them and their model. It was different between a sculptor and their model. The sculptor's liberty was an understanding that the artist could touch their model. That meant trying to feel the underlying skeleton and overlying musculature.

The first time I let my sculptor friend touch me was when she wanted to study my left knee, both front and back. I was sitting on my right side reclined immodestly like a Minotaur. It tickled me when she ran her fingers across my knee cap. She asked me if I minded her studying me like this and before I even gave it a second's thought I said 'no ... I don't mind.' In the space of my sittings for her she had studied most of me, except that most intimate place of me. There was a trust that I had for her and a respect that she had for me. It made for a good working relationship. Perhaps it had crossed her mind to want more from me. When you sit as an artist's model you are vulnerable to the artist's appetites. You are also honest to your own.

I once asked her if she ever sat for drawings. She said she had in the past and had even told me she had danced burlesque to pay a few bills, but she admitted it had been many years since she had sat as an artist's model. She then asked me why I had asked. I smiled and mentioned that I liked to draw. She understood what I was saying and we left it at that.

The thing is ... she did not say no. I looked across at my artist friend. Her back was turned to me. She turned and looked up at me, almost as if she could read my mind.

I guess Sophia needed to make amends for her earlier *faux pas* and so she said "nice wine," as she swirled the wine around her glass. She took a sip then walked over and took my glass up from my feet and offered it up to me. I took the glass, took a small sip and gave it back to her.

"That all?" I nodded. She took the wine glass from me and placed it carefully back down at my feet. Then she ran her hand from my knee down to my foot. I did not flinch an inch. "You have wonderful muscles." Sophia peered around my leg and looked at my backside. "Lovely." I could feel her hand was very warm.

Ruth had not noticed our little drama. She now had her back to me. She was hungry. "The hors d'oeuvres look wonderful," she said. And they did. I could see the plate being passed around and suddenly felt hungry. I had worked all afternoon and in my rush to get here I had not had the chance to

grab a bite to eat. My stomach sympathized with my thoughts and suddenly gave out a grumble.

My stomach's grumble was heard across the room and I was offered a hors d'oeuvre.

"Try the oysters," my artist friend suggested. The four women giggle in unison.

I nodded and so an oyster in a shell was offered off the plate to me by Ruth. She lifted up to me. I leaned down over her, smiled, took it, took hold of her hand and over turned the oyster in the palm of her hand. This was something she was not expecting. Then I bent forward and leisurely lapped the oyster up, tickling the palm of her hand with my tongue. The effect it had on Ruth was natural and powerful, for even under the billows of her dress her nipples became pronounced and her face went a bright crimson.

She stuttered as she asked me, "would you ... would you like another one?" I nodded and she brought a second oyster in a shell to me. I took it from Ruth but this time I overturned it into the palm of my hand and offered it to her. My hand was right in front of my loin cloth, within centimeters of the best of me. The look of astonishment on Ruth's face was priceless.

In her disbelief it was several seconds before she stepped closer to me and tried to enjoy her oyster. She bumped my stomach with her forehead. I stirred. She bumped me again in her struggle to down the oyster. Her tongue

was tickling the palm of my hand. I brought my hand yet closer to my body. Her nose was now tickling the best of me through the loin cloth. She would be taking in the musky essence of me. I could feel the warmth of her face against my belly.

She finally gulped the oyster down, turned her face and then looked up at me from her intimate vantage point. I could feel the warmth of her face on the best of me through the loin cloth. I knew deep down she wanted to tear the silly thing off there and then. If she had, I could not have stopped her. Instead she decided to do the next best thing. She turned to face me, brought her hand up and pulled back the front of the loin cloth ever so slightly and peered down behind it.

As she pulled on it I could feel the loin cloth slipping down my hips. I put my hands over the two ribbons to make sure she did not tug at them. I grabbed the front of the loin cloth to keep it from falling down too far.

She suddenly looked up at me. “Are you Jewish?” is all she said, in a way that sounded like approval.

I shook my head. “Catholic,” I whispered. She frowned, obviously disappointed.

She looked down again tugging even further on my loin cloth. “I didn’t know Catholics cut their boys.” Cut was the last word I expected to hear. The three other women looked at Ruth in surprise. There was an awkward silence.

“Ruth ...” It was Sophia. “You can’t just have it for yourself.”

“The evenings young ...” said Jessi, sipping the last of her wine. She was the only one who had finished their glass of wine. Jessi would be tipsy in short order.

“Shall we get started on the sculpture?” my artist friend asked.

After a few seconds Ruth let go of the front of the loin cloth and walked back to join her friends. I tugged the loin cloth back up onto my hips and as I did this I began to feel self-conscious. Maybe this birthday gig wasn’t a good idea after all, I thought. The rabbits looked ravenous, they had started to hop about, and we hadn’t even started the evening in earnest.

When you agree to be an artist model in a sense you accept the adage in for a penny ... in for a pound. Even with a loin cloth on sitting as an artist’s model is a rather courageous thing. It becomes even more interesting when the loin cloth comes off. I looked up at the clock on the wall. It was twenty minutes past six. I bet the loin cloth would be gone by eight at the latest I thought.

I then realized that I hadn’t asked how long I would be ‘sitting’ this evening. In fact, I should be asking my artist friend how long I would be ‘standing’ on this pedestal as they sculpted me.

My artist friend looked up at me and I smiled back. Hers was a reassuring smile. She was reassuring me that things would not get out of hand this evening if she could help it. But she was outnumbered three to one and I was four to one. Behind my smile and from my present vantage point, I knew that I could tease the four women, and get away with it up to a point. Although it was an awfully small and insignificant piece of fabric I knew I could tease them from behind my loin cloth. If you want to feel utterly vulnerable be an all but naked male artist model on a pedestal among a group of clothed and rapacious woman.

I knew for certain, once my loin cloth fell to the floor they would all but devour me. I could feel the best of me pressing against the loin cloth. I closed my eyes and counted slowly to ten. I was vulnerable enough standing here on this pedestal. The last thing I needed was a full blown erection to engross the four of them.

I heard something being moved and I quickly opened my eyes. From the corner of her atelier my artist friend produced a wooden stand atop which was an armature on which the sculpture would be built. The armature, or base frame, was about 75 cm high. I thought this rather ambitious to plan to complete a 75 cm tall sculpture of a 185 cm tall man in the space of one sitting. This sort of answered my unanswered question – how long? With an armature that size I figure I would be modeling for between three and four hours.

I watched as my artist friend next struggled to push a big plastic tub of artist's clay from the far corner of the atelier to beside the wooden stand. It took her

and Jess, and Sophia to push the tub across the room. It made a strange noise as it was pushed across the concrete floor.

“The call of the wild ...” Sophia joked, and the four women started to giggle. My face and chest grew flush. She was right. It had sounded just like a love sick moose call. On the thought of a love sick moose chasing after a cow in heat I stirred big time.

I had to adjust the loin cloth to keep me from poking out. Every time I stirred I knew it would be harder and harder to not be noticed, or worst yet to spring out of my loin cloth altogether. The woman knew this, and short of tugging on the ribbons they knew to tease me for effect.

While the three of them were pushing the plastic tub across the floor Ruth was eyeing me eagerly. I think she had noticed that I was bulging big time. I decided to tease her by pretending to tub on the ribbons. She nodded fervently. I just slowly shook my head, and then set my head at a coquettish angle and smirked to mock her. I then let my two hands slowly drop to my side.

Once the tub was beside the work stand Ruth was eager to grab a handful of clay and get started, but my artist friend stopped her hand. “Here let me give you something to put on.” She walked over to the hooks on the partition wall and gathered up some artist smocks and handed each of the other women an artist’s smock. She proceeded to put a smock on as well. Give each of them a beret to wear and we could be in Montparnasse.

Indeed they were eager to start. Each woman took up a lump of clay and proceeded in turn to force it onto the armature. Following the artist's lead they threw their lump onto the armature to insure it stuck. Then the artist started to form my feet and the trunk of my legs.

"You need to set down the mass of the model before you begin forming the precise shape." With those words the evening began in earnest. It was to be not merely a birthday party, but an art class and art session rolled into one.

My role was now doubly simple – be the artist's model and entertain. The entertaining would be easy and be spontaneous, but standing as David would be more challenging. In my mind's eye I tried to remember how Michelangelo's David stood. As she said 'set down the mass' I took up my best rendition of Michelangelo's famous sculptor. It was then that I realized that I did not have a towel to drape over my left shoulder. No matter I set my left hand atop my left shoulder and let my right hand dangle down my side. Then I looked away into the distance. I held this pose without looking at the four women who were taking turns throwing down lumps of clay onto the armature.

I suddenly smiled. Was it not God that formed man out of the clay of the early universe? I thought that if I were indeed made in God's image then God had a sense of humor.



As I stood there I tried to imagine how I looked in the eyes of the four women in the atelier. Surely each of them would perceive me in a different way. It was easy to imagine that my artist friend would view me as an objet d'art, and equally easy to imagine that Ruth hoped of me that I was her birthday 'boy toy.' But what about Jessi and Sophia? I had noticed the subtle smirk on Sophia face when Ruth blurted out that I was circumcised. Perhaps Sophia was set in her Slavic view of the world. When I said I was Catholic the sternness on Sophia face melted away. Jessi reacted differently. I think she fought the urge to come and peek behind the loin cloth with Ruth. She was genuinely curious and not disapproving like Sophia. It was then when I noticed Jessi quickly emptied out her glass of wine. One excess would have to replace the other.

I could feel that my artist friend was indeed being my friend and expressed her obligation to save me from any excesses the other three women might want of me. I also sensed that Jessi was a caring soul too. On the other side of the coin, Sophia I felt to be cynical and cold hearted in a Russian sort of way, while Ruth passionate and quick to feed her appetites as any Jewish princess might expect of her world.

And I was the fifth wheel ... the odd man out ... the only man in the room ... the object that threw everything else out of balance in the room, and for a reason – while at the same time being the center of all that would go on this evening.

I don't know why, but all this thought made me need to go empty my bladder. Maybe it was the worry. Maybe it was the adrenaline. Or maybe it was the endorphins. I looked up at the clock. It was ten minutes before the hour. I would try to hold on for ten more minutes, then step off the pedestal to take a break.

I looked over at the armature. The mass for my legs and torso was firmly set in place. The mass for my head and arms was being added. The pelvis was just beginning to take form.

My artist friend produced a set of sculptor tools and began to instruct the women as to how to remove and shape the clay. She started with my pelvis, which made sense because it was the centre of mass of me. She left the front of my pelvis flat to the surface of my chest. The refined details would come later. David did not wear a loin cloth, I thought.

“Turn around,” my artist friend asked. I obliged her. I turned around and I could hear sighs from the women behind me. I knew for certain that one came from Ruth and I guessed that the second came from Jessi. I don't know what it is that women find so appealing in a man's backside. (Mental note to myself – ask my artist friend). I looked up at the white wall in front of me and then had a wicked thought. I tugged at the ribbons and removed the loin cloth to give them an unencumbered view of the back of me. The women were behind me and huddled near the armature. In a few minutes I would step down from the pedestal and scramble to the bathroom. I doubt that anyone would take advantage of me then.

I could hear the lazy Susan at the top of the pedestal turn and my artist friend instructing them as to how best to form the human back and backside. It was good that the four women were behind me for I was now fully aroused. I would give them perhaps another ten minutes then step down from the pedestal and dash.

I started to count “one ... two ... three ...” counting up to 600 hundred.

I heard someone stir from the crowd behind me.

“Where do you think you are going?” It was Jessi’s voice.

“Just taking a closer look.” It was Ruth’s voice. Cheeky monkey I thought.

Before she could stand beside me I covered myself with my loin cloth and right hand. She was now standing beside me on my left. I turned my head and looked down at Ruth and whispered “be patient ...what’s the hurry?”

She just gave out another big sigh.

“Ruth come back ...” it was my artist friend. “Leave the model be. We don’t want to set him off do we?”

I wondered what exactly she meant by ‘set him off.’ Was there something deep, dark and sinister about Ruth that I should know? Did she really expect

me to be her ‘birthday boy toy?’ And what exactly were the other two women, Jessi and Sophia, expecting from me?

A chill suddenly wet down my spine. My urge to pee seemed to be more pressing. I had only counted past four hundred. Would I make it to six hundred?

Then I felt a hand timorously pass down the back of my leg. The hand had started just above my left knee and slowly went down to my ankle. I turned and looked back to see that it was Ruth, and she was staring at up me. She had an odd and distant expression on her face.

I looked over at my artist friend and said “I have to pee” and stepped off the pedestal leaving Ruth dazed and all by herself next to the pedestal. The three other women each had an expression of concern, more so my artist friend.

I left the bathroom door ajar and waited.

“Are you ok?” a familiar voice came from behind the door. “Ruth apologizes.”

“There’s no need for her to apologize. I am just a bit nervous.” I sighed.

My artist friend poked her head past the door into the bathroom. “Can I come in?”

I was holding my loin cloth over the best of me. I hesitated for a few seconds before answering. “Sure ...”

She stepped into the room and closed the door behind her. “Why are you so nervous? You have sat for me before.” My artist friend was trying to find out what I had on my mind.

“It’s just that ... I have never done something like this.” I pointed out of the room. “Modeling for you is one thing, but tonight the expectations go beyond modeling don’t you think?”

“Not from me.”

“That’s a given. But what about Ruth?”

“She’s a quite lonely woman.”

“I can see that. Given have a chance she is ready to tear the loin cloth off of me and devour me. I can be a treat for her but not a trick.”

My artist friend chuckled. “Oh ... I see ... I will tell her to behave herself.”

“At least for now. Its barely seven and I think it is going to take you several hours to finish the sculpture.”

“At least three, maybe longer.” She confirmed what I have already guessed.

“And your friend Sophia, what is she wanting from the evening?”

“She said she was bored and wanted an interesting evening out.”

“Well she get interesting for sure ...

“I have known Sophia for a long time. She comes from a good family and stays out of trouble.”

“Trouble?”

“She been separated from her husband for seven months now... he cheated on her.”

“A lot of that going about ...” My artist friend sighed when I said that. “Sorry ...”

“That’s ok ... Sophia and I have been spending a great deal of time together talking and trying to put our lives back together. I know Sophia ... If she wants something from you she shall ask ... that’s her style.”

“Fair enough. And Jessi? What’s up with her?”

“Well, she is already two sheets to the wind.”

“I can see that.”

“Things aren’t going too well between her and her husband.”

“Is she a good drunk?” I had to ask.

“A good drunk?”

“Does she giggle or get angry?”

“Giggle ... she gets a bit crazy.”

“Oh joy ... there’ll be two of them ... Ruth and Jessi.”

“I will ask Jessi to take it easy on the wine.”

“That’s a good idea. And last but not least you? What is it you want from me tonight?”

“Huh?”

“I can see it in your eyes.”

“Can you? What do you see?”

“Sadness and loneliness.”

From outside the door I could hear my artist friend's name being called. "I am coming," she called back.

"I'll be right out ..." I said to her. "Listen, I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"Let's get each of the women to write down two wishes they might have from me for today's party on pieces of paper and I will draw from a hat every half hour and well ... we will have some fun." I kind of knew where that might go but since I would be the one drawing from the hat I could kybosh the more crazy wishes.

"You would do that?" I nodded.

"If you put a little heart on your wishes I will know they are from you." I gave her a whimsical grimace. "Your wish is my command."

She just stood there and looked at me. I offered her my hand and she took it. Then I pulled her towards me and kissed her on the cheek. I could feel how warm her face was.

Still she stood there. I dropped my hand and just stood and turned to face the toilet ... "God made a man's protuberance for pleasure and for peeing. I don't think you mind the pleasure but ... I have to pee."



She looked down at me. “I better let you be then ...” I waited until she was out the door.

Right across the wall in front of me was a full length mirror. I looked up into the mirror and stared at myself as I emptied my bladder. Yes, God does have a sense of humor!

It took me a few seconds to set myself back into my loin cloth. I grabbed a towel as a prop and then I rejoined the four women. I stopped for a good minute and listened from behind the partition.

“Is he coming back?” I could hear Ruth ask worriedly.

“He said he would,” my artist friend calmed her.

“Have you finished writing up your wishes?” It was Jessi. “Who thought of this marvelous idea.””

“He suggested it ... he’s rather worried you’re going to jump him.” It was my artist friend cautioning them.

“Don’t wish anything to scare him away. I am rather enjoying this,” was Jessi’s retort.

“This is fun ...” Ruth responded.

Sophia was silent. I wondered why she was silent.

It was then that I stepped out from behind the partition. Three of the four women were waiting for me to return. They threw the last of their wishes in a small bucket. Only Sophia seemed distracted and had her head bowed. Her thoughts were somewhere else.

Ruth piped up. “The wishes idea is great. We decided that three wishes apiece would be better than just two.”

I looked up at the clock. “There are only two halves to each hour and we will be doing this until perhaps ten. That leaves only six wishes. That’s why I suggested two apiece.”

Jessi was holding the bucket, stirring the pieces of paper and perhaps peeking at what was written on them. She looked in and counted the pieces of paper. “There are eleven wishes,” she said. “Someone only put in two wishes.” She looked up around the room. I figured it was my artist friend. The other women were smiling like Cheshire cats.

“Here given me the wishes,” my artist friend said. “I will draw them out of the bucket when its time.” Jessi handed her the bucket.

So much for me being able to vet the wishes. Well, two can play at this game I thought. “Here ... give me some pieces of paper. I am going to write a few wishes of my own and drop them in.” The women were intrigued.

“Really ... what kind of wishes?” Ruth asked.

“You’ll see.” I parried.

My artist friend handed me some scraps of paper and a blue pen. My wishes would dilute out the one-sidedness of our game, and they would perhaps even the playing field. I tossed my wishes in the bucket as I wrote the five wishes and mixed the paper around. “There!” There were now sixteen wishes and only time for six. Odds out two of my wishes would be drawn. I had written a wish specifically for each of the four women, and the last one for myself.

“They’ll be naughty wishes for sure,” Jessi said as I tossed the last of the five in the bucket. I looked over at her and gave her a sly grin.

“All’s fair in frivolity,” I quipped as I walked confidently over to the pedestal.

“Ready to continue?” my artist friend asked me. I nodded.

I looked back at the four women and decided some stirring of the pot was needed. All though this bit of fun Sophia had not say anything. In fact she looked rather depressed.

“Sophia ...” She raised her head and looked over at me.

“Yes?”

“Can you help me up onto the pedestal?” I gave her a beckoning smile and offered her my hand.

She nodded and stepped forward and offered me her hand in return. I turned my back to the three other women and then carefully stepped up onto the pedestal so that I was showing them only my backside. Only Sophia stood halfway before me. She held half my weight as I lifted myself off the ground, all the time holding my loin cloth in place.

When I was safely standing atop the pedestal she let go of my hand. Then she whispered “are you taking it off again?”

“What?” I asked even though I knew *what* it was she wanted taken off

“You know ...” she motioned with her eyes.

“Should I?” I thought I might tease her a bit.

“We ‘re sculpting your bum ... like before” she smirked as she said this.

“You like my bum?” I whispered to her.

She nodded.

“I will take it off once you are back with the three of them.” Sophia pouted and then rejoined her friends. I looked over my shoulder and saw they were ready to continue, so I tugged at the ribbons and doffed the loin cloth holding it in my right hand and draping the towel over my left shoulder. The women giggled and got back to their sculpting.

As I stood there I felt that warmth that told me that my sex was aroused and my musk was flowing. Ever so often a small drop of thick fluid would start its viscous plunge like little icicles from the tip of the best of me. I wondered if the woman could see that this was happening. The slow drip ... drip ... drip ... added to the sexual tension.

After perhaps twenty minutes my artist friend asked that I turn around. I struggled back into my loin cloth before turning to face the women. I could see that the lower part of the sculpture had begun to take form. I look up at the clock. The women saw me doing this and so they giggled.

“Ten minutes.” Ruth said cheerfully.

I just shrugged. I did this partly to feign indifference and partly to move the muscles in my shoulder that were sore from the pose. I guess I was nervous because my stomach grumbled.

“Still hungry eh ...?” It was Jessi who stated the obvious.

“I didn’t have dinner. I rushed right over.” I responded.

Before Ruth could rush to the plate Jessi had stepped forward with the hors d’oeuvre tray. “What can I offer you?” I looked down at the tray. There was some caviar on rye bread and cream cheese.

“Maybe some caviar?” I leaned forward and offered her my hand but she had other plans.

She took one of the caviar hors d’oeuvres and held it in her teeth. She wanted me pluck it from her mouth. So I bent down and placed one hand on each of her shoulders to balance myself and I leaned forward, tilted my head and lickety-split the hors d’oeuvre was no more. Jessi gave me a glassy eyed smile when I was nose to nose with her. I think she had already had too much to drink. I could tell also tell this from her swaying traipse back to the others.

There was an annoyed look on Ruth’s face, almost as if she thought I was there only for her. For another ten minutes I kept the pose and then exactly at the bottom of the hour it was Ruth who said “time for a wish.”

My artist friend set down her carving tools, rubbed some of the clay off her hands and then lifted a small folded piece of paper from the bucket. I tensed up expecting the worst.

“Ruth wants to kiss the model,” was the wish that was read out.

Carefully balancing myself on the pedestal, I got down on my knees and Ruth stepped forward and before I could get ready she grabbed my head on both sides and planted a kiss forcefully on my lips. She tasted of hors d'oeuvres and wine and, to be perfectly honest, wasn't a very good kisser.

Ruth was quite pleased with herself as she sauntered back to the clay sculpture and her friends.

“How was he?” Jessi asked.

“Not bad ...” Ruth said so proudly.

In an instant the first wish of the evening was behind us. I was relieved. It was such a simple wish. I had expected something more raw and dramatic. I stood again, took up the pose and the women went back to their sculpture.

What my artist friend had done is divided my figure into four quadrants and each of the four women were hard at work at their quarter of me. From time to time one or another of them would stop for a few minutes, walk over to where I was posing on the pedestal and take a closer look at my skeleton or muscles. As they did this none of them thought of touching me. I found that odd after the earlier ‘artistic liberty’ that had taken. Perhaps they were biding their time?

As the minutes progressed to the top of the hour I found myself relaxing. The focus seemed to be on the art and not on the entertainment. I took a moment to crouch and take a long sip from my glass of wine. The wine helped to rinse away the taste of Ruth's kiss from my mouth.

Ruth kiss had reminded me of an old paternal aunt that expected a kiss from all her relatives at Christmas time. She had never married and had helped raise a bevy of her nieces and nephews from infancy. She was the aunt that was always available to baby sit on special occasions, or when your parents went away on a two week trip and didn't want to bring 'the kids.' Despite the ages of her nieces and nephews she expected a kiss on the mouth. Usually she tasted of spearmint, since she almost lived on life savers. I could see Ruth becoming someone's dithering aunt – it looked like she was half way there already.

Then it was time for another wish. My artist friend picked a piece of paper from the bucket. "It's from Jessi ... she wants you to take off the loin cloth."

I shook my head. "Not yet ... maybe later."

"That's not fair," Jessi retorted. "What's the use of asking us for our wishes if you aren't going to grant them!" She glared at me. Then her demeanor changed suddenly. She started towards the pedestal. "Ruth had a peek ... I want one too." I could tell she was tipsy and I knew I was in no position to stop her. If I tried to struggle with her I might fall off the pedestal, bringing the evening's festivities to an end.



Jessi was a bull in a china shop and I was the china, so I let her have her way. She tugged at the front of the loin cloth, peered in and started to giggle. With her other hand she started to paw me, moving the best of me about so that she could get a better view. It was damned awkward, but I let her manhandle me. Her hand was hot, passionate and insistent. I stared down at her and could see down the cleavage in her dress. She was wearing soft pink underneath.

“Jessi ...” It was my artist friend. “Behave yourself!” She stopped and looked at her friends.

“Not very big is he?” was all Jessi could say. I started to laugh and she glared up at me. I was annoyed at her but I didn’t want to show it. I thought a bit of reverse psychology was in order. I would not be defensive, but neither would I be offensive, just clever with her.

“Why are you laughing?” she was offended. My reverse psychology seems to be working.

“I have never had such a complaint before,” I stated earnestly. The other women joined me in my frivolity. Jessi looked back at them and let go of my loin cloth. Her face was crimson red. She started to laugh too and walked back to her friends. She poured herself another glass of wine and drank a mouthful of it.

“Can you turn around again?” My artist friend asked me. “It’s time to work on your back a bit and your shoulders.” I turned around and once again decided to remove the loin cloth. After the Jessi’s manhandling I had grown to sizeable proportions, which is perhaps why my artist friend thought it best to get me to turn around so that they could concentrate on their sculpture and not the finer attributes of the model. It was good she had asked me to turn because I think it was unlikely in my present state that I would have stayed completely within the loin cloth. Something would be poking out, or dropping out altogether.

For the next fifteen minutes or so it was my back they were sculpting. The sun had gone down and the atelier began to grow cold. I wondered how long it would be before the cold got to me. My adrenaline edge was starting to dull. I could feel my body heat dissipate into the room. I could feel goose bumps start to appear and the hair on my body start to trap my body heat. I started to shiver.

They worked rather well together and gossiped a great deal as they worked. I guess women do that. Men are not as talkative as women are – which is one of the main reasons why I prefer the company of women over that of men. Women are more interesting creatures than men to listen to and to watch.

There is also that mystery about them, hidden away behind their dresses and other outfits they adorn themselves with. What they wore told a great deal about women. For instance, without looking back at the four of them I recalled what each of the four women were wearing on their feet. Their

footwear said something about each of them. Ruth wore unadorned black pumps very much in her simple character. They looked scuffed and well worn. Sophia wore a brand new pair of espadrilles. I could see her setting those aside at the end of the evening if they had so much as a speck of clay on them. Jessi wore a shiny pair of polished red low heel shoes, the kind you might wear on a fancy date. Her shoes told me that she figured this evening was a fancy date. My artist friend wore a plain pair of sneakers, something perfect for working in her atelier. For her, this evening was just another day at her office. I admired her because she struggled to keep her dream alive – her art *praxis*.

You might wonder why I used the word *praxis* instead of practice. Perhaps it is because being an artist is different from being an average Jill or Joe, or a teacher, a doctor or poet. Being an artist required not only a different group of skills, but a different way of perceiving the world. Creative people like poets or artists have a unique appreciation of the human condition.

You stand a naked man in front of the average Jill or Joe and all they see is the soft tissue between his legs. A teacher might feel obliged to explain human biology and physiology, grasping closely and referring to a textbook because most teachers are not much more than a high school student themselves with a few extra years of university art history, or English literature, or undergraduate biology under their belts. You let a doctor study a naked man and they search for symptoms of anything that might afflict them. A doctor is there to cure human suffering, not to celebrate the human condition. A poet might write a lusty limerick, or mock the puny vulnerability

of the model. You might note that most poems about the human condition have been written by men and is about their lustful affliction towards the fairer sex.

You set a nude man on a pedestal in front of an artist and they begin by seeing the action lines, the skeleton, the musculature, the overlying tissue and last but perhaps not least those parts that make him a man. The artist might sculpt him, or draw or paint him. Artists view the world in their own unique fashion.

As I thought about this, I wondered how the three other women perceived the all but naked man perched on the pedestal before them. I wondered what they did professionally. Given the way she was dressed I figured that Jessi had something to do with the service industry. Sophia was dressed like someone who worked in an office and did not have to interact with the general public. I could see Ruth being a teacher of children and someone who is starved of adult interaction. Maybe she taught elementary school – perhaps fourth or fifth grade.

“It’s 8 o’clock,” Ruth sang. Yes, I think she taught elementary school. I figure I should ask her, but not before I had put my loin cloth back on. When I was ready I turned around.

“Ruth may I ask you something?” She looked up at me with anticipation.

“Yes ... please do.” I suspect she was expecting a more intimate question.

“Are you a teacher by any chance?” I asked her.

“How did you know?” She was both surprised and disappointed at the same time.

“Elementary school?” She nodded hesitantly.

“Why do you want to know?” She was apprehensive.

“I have been standing wondering what each of you do as a living. Nothing more. When you sit as an artist’s model you think about different things. That’s all.” My explanation set her mind to rest.

“I see ...” Her spirits picked up.

“Sophia do you work in an office?”

Sophia nodded. “I work in a bank, how could you tell?”

“I am rather good at people watching.” I did not want to seem too boastful.

“And me?” Jessi asked slurring her words.

“I think you have something to do with the service industry.”

“Clever boy,” she raised her glass then took another sip. “Can you be more specific?”

“I need more clues from you ... of the three of you, you are the enigma. The riddle. The puzzle.” She laughed when I said that. “I think it is because you have been the Jill of many trades. You have had several different jobs haven’t you?”

“You’re good .... Isn’t he good,” she swept her glass towards her friends nearly spilling white wine over them.

“Jessi ... be careful, you’ll spill you wine all over me!” Sophia was annoyed. But it was too late. Some of the wine splashed across her new espadrilles. “Now look what you have done. You have ruined them.” I smiled. I had pegged Sophia and her shoes perfectly. I could see her putting them in the ‘to donate box’ when she got home.

“I forgot to tell you he’s both observant and very clever,” my artist friend shared her judgment of me with her three friends. “A bit too clever at times.”

Ruth took the clue and turned back to glare at me. “Trying to distract us weren’t you?” Ruth wagged a finger at me. She brought them back on task. “It’s time for another wish ...” Another wish was picked from the bucket.

“This one’s from him. He wants the four of us to remove our brassieres.”

Well if there was a fox let loose amongst the hens it could not have caused more confusion. Ruth grabbed her bosom. Jessi started to giggle

uncontrollably. Sophia gave me a most scornful glare and my artist friend just shook her head and said tsk, tsk, tsk.

“You are a saucy one aren’t you?” was Jessi’s response. “Sue why not. She proceeded to start unbuttoning the front of her dress.

“Jessi!” It was Sophia who chastised her.

“Look he’s bare breasted,” was Jessi’s answer, pointing at me. I was right. She was wearing soft pink underneath her dress. “Come on Sophia ... don’t be so self-conscious. His wish doesn’t say we have to show him our boys ...”

Ruth and my artist friend had both gotten into the spirit of my wish. My artist friend opened the front of her blouse just enough to reach in and unclasp the front of her bra. Then she did the contortionist moves that girls know to remove her brassiere without taking off her blouse.

“There ...” She threw her bra down at my feet. Perhaps apples here. Her’s was a practical white thing which she produced almost by magic from one of the arms of her blouse.

Ruth did her own version of the trick. Her’s was a frilly black thing that must have been a double D. She was a little self-conscious and held herself up with left forearm. Her face was a pale shade of crimson. I smiled appreciatively.

Jessi was brash and opened her dress enough for me to see her breasts as she freed them from her brassiere. She was three sheets to the wind and well not very inhibited. I clapped as she did her performance. She looked up at me and let the front of her dress dropped. And voila, she was bare breasted just like me.

The three other women watched her in amazement as she did this and only Sophia showed any disapproval. Sophia tucked her back into her dress as Jessi just stood there with a drunken expression on her face.

“Beautiful ... very beautiful.” I said. “God created women’s breasts to make us men envious.”

Jessi clapped to my poetic limerick. “You aren’t just a pretty face ... you are a philosopher.”

This left only Sophia who hadn’t tossed her intimacy into play. Jessi turned to her and said “It’s your turn now. The rest of us have set our boys free.”

Sophia had a pained expression on her face. I wondered if it was because she had small breasts. Perhaps it was. As I looked at her I thought back to a poem I had written of a woman I knew who was often mocked for her flat chest.

I looked at Sophia with an understanding smile and began to recite my poem:

### **Oh Well – They Are Enough**



Admittedly, they are quite small  
Twin curiosities at best  
deceptions that belie their age  
the true, the time ... the test

I am not scared of them  
But are they scared of me?  
They sometimes poke or peak  
then hide away, you see.

They intrigue, these chirlish twos  
that never grew, mere hills  
short shrift, perhaps beneath the bill  
but then again ... so what

With time, they'll remain the same  
when other mighty mountains slough  
if ever needed they'll grow again  
As such – oh well – they are enough.

Tears appeared in Sophia's eye. She looked so sad. I stepped off the pedestal and walked towards her. I peered into her eyes, leaned forward and whispered into her ear "if you don't want to ... you don't have to."

She whispered into my ear. “Will you do it for me?” Then she lowered her eyes and I began to unbutton the front of her blouse. I took her blouse off her and unclasped her and removed her brassiere. As I did all this I continued to peer into her eyes. I did not look down. Then I carefully put her blouse back on her.

As I walked back to the pedestal I dropped her bra onto the pile. I had been right. It was half padded ... and she was modestly endowed.

Sophia said nothing and rushed to the bathroom.

My artist friend followed her to the bathroom and came back a half minute later. “She has locked herself in the bathroom and is crying,” she said.

“Now look what you have done,” said Jessi. Ruth had a frown on her face, perhaps worried that her birthday party has been ruined.

“She wants to talk to you,” my artist friend said and Jessi started towards the bathroom. “Not you ... him.” She motioned at me with her thumb.

“Me?” I said, surprised.

My artist friend nodded and then walked me over to the bathroom door. “Be respectful ... her boy friend and her have just broken up and she is an emotional wreck.” Oh, I thought, that would explain her solemn state of mind.

We walked pensively to the bathroom door, she knocked at it and said “Sophia it’s me.”

After a split second the door was opened and before I could do anything she had grabbed my hand, dragged me into the bathroom and locked the door behind her.

I turned to face her and asked “Are you ok?” She had tears streaming down her face. Obviously she was not ok. Here I was quite vulnerable, in the midst of a woman who was in emotional turmoil. I needed to set the tone so I said “Your boy friend has just left you, hasn’t he.”

She nodded, taking a big gulp.

“Had the two of you been together long?”

“Five years. He wanted to marry me ... but I said no.” She sighed as she said this.

I stepped forward and gave her a hug. It seemed the thing to do at the time. She folded her arms in front of her as if she was praying.

“You must be very sad,” I said to her. She nodded. “I didn’t mean to upset you ...”

“I know ...you are a very kind man. I could tell that when you took my brassiere off me. You didn’t look down at my flat chest.”

“Can I tell you something?”

She nodded.

“Not all men like big breasted women.”

“No?”

“There are many women who probably envy you. They are the ones with sore shoulders and sagging breasts. You know ... when you have your babies your breasts will fill full up milk and they will do what they are there to do.”

She stopped crying. “Do you like my small breasts?”

“I didn’t see them. I wasn’t looking.”

Her hands lifted to the top button of her blouse then hesitated. Then she started to unbutton her blouse. She opened her blouse and I looked down at her. Her breasts were small, but her nipples and areola were the normal size.

“They are beautiful.” Then I did something perhaps I shouldn’t have. I leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek. She immediately wrapped her arms

around my neck and pulled me close to her so that her bare chest and mine were now touching. She felt soft and warm.

I felt sorry for her and her sadness. “Sophia ...I took the bus here. Will you drive me home after the party?”

She unwrapped her arms from my neck and let go of me. “You’re not going home with Ruth?”

“No, why should I?” The thought had not crossed my mind. On top of it all, I had not expected this surprising comment from Sophia. “Is Ruth expecting to take me home to bed?”

Sophia nodded. “Surely you had figured that out by now. She has all but said that to us. ”

“No I am not going to bed with her. And I am not going to let her take advantage of me. She’s not my type.”

“Who is your type?” Sophia asked.

“A less indulgent person. Someone with poise and character. Someone mature and self-assured ... someone like you.” I don’t know why I said ‘someone like you.’ The thought just sort of just popped out of my mind. If there was someone who could take me home it would be Sophia. Maybe I was a bit tipsy from the wine or maybe the emotions of my surroundings were

poking through? “I could see Ruth smothering any happiness I might have to share. She is like an indulgent child. Was she an only child growing up?”

Sophia nodded. I want you to drive me home tonight. If you do I will grant you one special wish ... whatever you might desire of me to make amends for hurting your feelings.”

We stood looking at each other for a few second. She was now much happier. I started to button up her blouse. As I did this I passed the back of my hand across the soft feminine skin on her chest. I could see goose bumps arise all over her arms. She let out a contented sigh. I had cheered her up.

“I better go back,” I said. “They will be wondering what’s going on in here.”

“Yes, you better ... they will be wondering” Sophia said. “Besides, I have to pee.” When she said that I suddenly had the urge to pee as well, but I thought that had better wait.

I walked to the door and slowly opened it. Then I looked back. Sophia was already peeing. She had lifted her dress and dropped her panties but was not sitting completely down. It was something I had never knew was done by girls. It astonished me. She saw that I was watching her and waved at me to look away. I did but the mirror along the wall gave a different angle and was more revealing.

Before she had finished I stepped through the door and out into the atelier. I stopped again for a moment behind the partition to listen in.

“What’s taking them so long?” It was Ruth and she was annoyed.

“They’re just talking,” my artist friend said. “Just talking Ruth. He hurt her feelings and he’s trying to make amends.”

“Make amends ...” Jessi said this in a mocking way. She slurred her words. It was now certain she was four sheets to the wind.

I stepped out from behind the partition. “yes, we were just talking. I wanted to apologize to Sophia for hurting her feelings. She is very sensitive about ... certain things.” I gave Ruth the evil eye. She responded with a look of astonishment. The pile of brassieres was still there at the foot of the pedestal. I picked them up off the floor and one by one set them beside each other onto the table. “Maybe I should keep these as a souvenir of our evening together.”

Jessi put her hands to her covered breasts and bobbed them up and down. “I bet when you order thanksgiving turkey it’s all white breast meat.” She giggled uncontrollably.

“Yes ... I love breasts .... with lots of cranberry sauce too.” I figured I should humor Jessi lest she spin out of control. She was a giggly drunk, and I thought I might have to use that to our advantage. Our, in the sense that all five of us were trapped in a circumstance that needed to be played through to its final

act. I don't know why I felt this way but I wanted to stay and see how the evening ended.

Without being asked I walked back over to the pedestal. "Let's continue," I commanded. "How do you want me to stand?"

"Without the loin cloth," Ruth insisted.

I turned abruptly to face Ruth. "Not yet ..." I shook my head. "Not yet ..." I was no longer aroused. In fact, I was at the beginnings of an entirely different state of being altogether. If anyone of the three women had been listening closely to my voice they might have noticed that I was annoyed at them. Not even my artist friend understood. Between Ruth the indulgent princess, tipsy Jessi, and sensitive Sophia things were beginning to become too complicated for me, complicated in the sense that I was vulnerable in a room with at least one rapacious woman.

"What exactly will you do when the loin cloth comes off?" I studied her face intently.

"Enjoy myself ..." Ruth countered.

"In what way? Can you be trusted with a naked male model?"

Ruth's mouth fell open and she didn't respond to my question. Behind Ruth Jessi was shaking her head.



I glance up at the clock. It was quarter before nine. It could not be ten o'clock fast enough. I clambered back up on the pedestal turned my back to the three women and doffed my loin cloth. "Let's get on with it ... I am getting cold and tired." Now if that is a not so subtle message then what is?

When Sophia came to join her friends she walked right by me without looking up. It must have taken her a great deal of self-discipline to do this but she knew if she looked up the resentment she would receive from Ruth would have been unbearable. I now knew for certain I had an ally in Sophia.

"Well ... " It was Ruth.

"Well what?" Sophia retorted.

"What does he look like?" Ruth was insistent.

"Huh?"

"You walked right by him and didn't notice?" I smiled. That's pushing her buttons isn't it, I thought. I looked down. I was just a lump of soft tissue. Gravity had taken hold of me and well it was cold. It was confirmed. Ruth didn't interest me.

"Ruth ... we are here to do art." My artist friend said. "Let's finish the sculpture shall we."

“We are here to celebrate my birthday ...” Ruth said this with an abrasive tone.

“Yes we are ...” Jessi said. “And look what we have arranged for your birthday. Look up there ... we brought you ... all the way from Florence Italy ... Michelangelo’s David.”

I smiled. The three other women were tugging at Ruth’s dress telling her to not be so indulgent. They knew that if she did not stop, the evening would come to an abrupt end and well ... the fun hadn’t really started yet. I wasn’t wearing my loin cloth ... and I had my back turned to them.

I put a hand over the best of me and turned around. “Yes Ruth ... don’t be so impatient.” She stared up at me. Well, to be perfectly honest she stared at my hand covering the best of me. I glanced up at the clock then turned around once again presenting my backside and took up the David pose. There was silence for a few minutes but I could hear someone scraping away at the clay on the sculpture. In another ten minutes it would be time for another wish.

For the next ten minutes there was a dedicated silence as the four ‘artists’ worked on their sculpture. Our recent minor drama had played itself out. Things had settled down at least for a little while. For how long we would soon find out. At the top of the hour I put the loin cloth back on and stepped off the pedestal and wrapped myself in a blanket.

“Getting cold?” my artist friend asked me. I nodded. “Let me make you some mint tea.” I smiled.

“But first the wish,” Ruth insisted that a wish was drawn from the bucket first.

I shrugged my shoulders and gave an indifferent frown. My artist friend chose a paper from the bucket. “It’s from Sophia. She wants the party to continue until eleven.”

Ruth clapped her hand enthusiastically. “What a wonderful idea. Jessi lifted her glass in acknowledgement and took another sip.

I looked up at Sophia, smiled and nodded. “Sounds fine by me.” I knew that at eleven Sophia would safely rescue me from whatever misfortune lay at midnight. Sophia’s wish would be a blessing. This meant that perhaps for the two hours or so I could remain modestly attired and not be thrown to the hungry rabbits.

“Let me put on the kettle,” my artist friend said. “I will make a pot of tea just in case someone else wants some.”

I got up from my chair and walked across the cold concrete floor to the tray of hors d’oeuvres. There were a few egg ones left over and so I picked one up and put it into my mouth. I chewed it slowly as I walked by Ruth who was hungrily staring at me. I must have looked rather funny in the pink robe that I had on. There was a green robe hanging up on the partition, the robe I usually

wore, but today I decided to toy with fate. I walked to the armature and slowly studied the half finished sculpture from all angles. It wasn't that bad given the fact that there were four of them and given the fact that only one of the four was an experienced artist.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Ruth.

I slowly looked up at Ruth. "Rather nice, actually. Do you get to take it home with you?"

Jessi answered my question. "Oh course she does!"

As Jessi said this, Ruth nodded licking her lower lip with her wet tongue. I wondered if Ruth could distinguish between taking the sculpture home, or whether all she could see was the sculpture's model?

"The rest of us will go home empty handed." As she said this Jessi swiftly slapped my backside. I hadn't expected that so I turned around and playfully swatted her backside in return. "Now ... now ... don't be too cheeky," I retorted. The play escalated as Jessi offered me her backside again and began to giggled uncontrollably. I picked up a paddle from the little table next to the armature and waved it through the air. "Wouldn't you like to have you backside paddled!"

Jessi lifted her dress and exposed a buttock. "Don't let me stop you!" So I brought the paddle ever so gently down on her backside.

“We’ll leave that for your birthday party.”

“Is it a promise?” Jessi was enjoying herself immensely.

“Promise.”

As Jessi played with me a dark cloud had settled above Ruth. She was not going to let Jessi upscale her. She turned around and lifted her dress and said.

“And what about me?”

Ruth had an enormous bum. Out of the corner of my eye I spotted a black marker. I picked it up took off the cap and started to draw a face on her right buttock. Ruth was expecting a whack and not a scribble but when she realized what I was doing she left me be. I drew a man’s face in the style of Matisse on one buttock and a man’s penis in the style of Matisse on the other one. Then I signed Henri Matisse under the face.

As I did this, the other women watched and chuckled. “Here let me take a picture.” Jessi said picking up her purse to look for her cell phone.

Ruth dropped her dress and said “no! Is there a mirror in the bathroom?”

My artist friend nodded and Ruth dashed off to take a look at what I had drawn. I leaned over and whispered to my artist friend, “I just realized it’s a permanent marker.”

“I don’t think she’ll mind,” she whispered back. “Let me poor you some tea. I have also turned the heat on in the atelier.”

“Great ... I might just make it through until eleven after all.” I took a cup of tea from my friend then sat down bundling myself up as I held the hot cup between my hands. The heat from the tea flowed through my body like an elixir. I closed my eyes and breathed deeply.

Just then Ruth returned. She did not say anything but she did have a smile of sorts on her face and the dark cloud seems to have drifted away.

“Let’s give the model a short break.” I nodded. Sophia brought me the last of the egg hors d’oeuvre.

“Maybe now’s a good time to bring out the cake,” my artist friend said. As she did this I got up and went to the bathroom and locked myself in. I could hear the women singing happy birthday through the bathroom door. I did not want to join them but felt a few minutes of quiet respite would help me through the rest of the evening. I stayed in the bathroom for perhaps ten minutes leaning on the counter drinking my tea. Then I had a pee and returned to the atelier.

The cake was half cut and eaten. It was one of those Bavarian chocolate cake. A cut piece was there on a paper plate with a fork. Without even asking

whether I wanted a piece Ruth thrust it at me. I smiled and said “Happy Birthday” as she offered the piece of cake to me.

“Thanks ... I am enjoying my birthday party. Thanks for coming and being my model.”

I smirked when she said ‘my’. I guess she still had other plans for me later. I would have to think of some way of frustrating her ultimate objective. I could not go home with her. Ruth was so large that if she bedded me and I was on top of her she would snatch me up whole or if she was on top of me she would smother me for sure. What was I going to do? I sat nibbling on the birthday cake looking down at the layer upon layer of the intricate cake. As I looked at it, the cake became an allegory to life. As I cut through each layer with my fork I thought that a simple solution to my predicament had to present itself. Then a thought came to mind. What if her romantic intent were played out here in the atelier instead of at her place? I smiled. I knew what needed to be done.

I set the half finished cake on the floor under my chair and finished off my tea. Then I stood, took off the pink robe and hung it up on its nail. I marched to the pedestal and mounted it. Then I just stood there waiting for the women to take note. For the past few minutes the Bavarian cake had caught their attention. I didn’t mind this at all. It redirected their appetites from me.

It was Sophia who first took up the sculptor’s knife and started on her part of the work. Off in the far corner both Jessi and Ruth had gotten themselves into

a disagreement. What about I did not know, and it was my artist friend who was trying to break them apart.

“You make a good model,” Sophia said to me. I could barely hear what she said over the ruckus in the corner.

I put my hand to my ear. “What?”

She repeated ...”I said you make a good model.” When they heard Sophia say this both Jessi and Ruth abruptly stopped their argument and the room went silent.

“Isn’t it time for a wish?” I said. With this priceless words the two squabbling women set aside their differences and walked back to the sculpture. My artist friend walked over to the bucket and picked out a piece of paper.

“It’s from Ruth again ... remove the loin cloth ...”

“Not yet,” I said. “Choose another wish.

She chose another wish from the bucket and giggled. “This wish is from Sophia. She wants to hold your testicles in her hand.”

I gave a look of surprise. Sophia looked at me with her honest blue eyes. Then she said “I saw Ruth write her three wishes ... I had expected the loin cloth would be off by now. ”



I gave out a sigh. Well, Sophia just let the cat out of the bag telling me that Ruth's wishes were to see me bare. I wondered what the other women's wishes were in the bucket. Sophia's wish was a bit too bold for me, but it was a legitimate wish. What could I do but accede?

"Can I ask why?" I was curious.

"I never have held a man's balls. I have always wanted to. They're kind of funny things. Where you boys make sperm ... " She giggled when she said 'sperm.' I chuckled too because she said the word with a thick Slavic accent. She could lay it on thick when she wanted to. And she wanted to.

"I won't take off the loin cloth ... but you should be able to hold me in your hand." Sophia strode forward and then stood in front of me. She had her back to the others who were watching her and me closely. They wondered what I was going to do. Ruth stepped forward then Jessi as well. My artist friend stayed beside the sculpture and continued working. I could see she was starting to work on my head.

The three women just stood there in front of me. Jessi just stood there glassy eyed and swaying. She was evidently drunk. I could feel Ruth's heavy and hot breath against my stomach. As Sophia stood nearest to me I pulled aside the bottom of the loin cloth and they fell into view. I held the top of the loin cloth close to my body so that nothing else fell into view. I felt very warm

between my legs. My testicles were responding to the sexual tension of the moment.

“Look at them, they’re huge” said Ruth gleefully. Ruth was reaching for them when Sophia swatted her hand away. “It’s my wish. You’ll have to wait your turn!” Sophia reached up with her right hand and held them at the tip of her fingers. She was thrilled. “They are so big, and so soft.” She began to giggle them about with her fingers. “They’re not balls at all.”

“They aren’t spheres if that is what you mean.” I responded.

“They have a different shape altogether.” She used her fingers to find their shape. “And they’re hanging from something.”

“Ouch.” I flinched. “Don’t squeeze.” I reached down and touched her hand. “It’ll hurts. The things they’re hanging from are the veins and the sperm ducts.”

“So these are your family jewels.” Sophia face shone as she looked up at me. “You boys are so funny...”

“I could say the same things about you girls.” I countered.

“Really ...” It was Jessi piping in. “In what way I may ask? Your sex is ridiculous and on top of it all, you have hair all over your body like a gorilla.”

“Ridiculous!” I knew she was playing with me, so I decided to play along.  
“You think I am a gorilla?”

“Well. You have you own banana!” The four women laughed when she said this. What she said made me feel so trivial and silly. I stood there silent with the four of them just mocking me. I nearly reacted in a primal manner. I fought the urge to tear off my loin cloth with my own hand and swing back and forth like a gorilla, grunting like a primate. It would have been hilarious, but if I did that I would lose all respect in their eyes and then the evening would take a turn to the ludicrous. Perhaps this is what Jessi wanted me to do? Perhaps this is what she did with her husband ...me Jane, you gorilla? Instead I just rubbed my hand across my chest, across the curls of my hair. My nipples started to grow hard and the women saw that.

“Yes, so but so beautifully ridiculous.” Jessi started to laugh. “What do you think about that?”

Out numbered four to one and surrounded I still felt the need to defend what I am to what she is. “Sure, on a boy everything is on the outside. It all sticks out. That’s what a boy is all about. In a girl it’s all mysterious and hidden away. When a boy and a girl get together the outside meets the inside, pure and simple.”

“It’s neither pure ... and it ain’t simple ... believe me!” Jessi was enjoying herself. “You boys have it easy. Try pushing a baby into the world ... ha ...

“I am actually envious.”

“Envious? You never have to have a period and bleed all over the place.”  
Jessi was getting a bit too graphic for me.

“Yes ... but I will never bring a new life into the world either.” I looked straight into her eyes. I detected a sense of dignity in her. “Yes, I am very envious.”

All along while Jessi and I had been jesting Sophia had continued with her fun. All this talk about babies had gotten me aroused. And Sophia’s manhandling was also beginning to tickle me.

“They’re moving,” Sophia explained removing her hand, “all by themselves.” She watched them closely. “Do they have a mind of their own?”

“They do. I am getting aroused ... when a man gets aroused they move close into the body.”

“Then what happens?” Sophia was amused beyond words.

“Well ...” Jessi had a Cheshire cat smile on her face. “If he gets too aroused you know exactly what will happen.” I was beginning to take to Jessi not only because she had a great sense of humor, but because in her inebriated state she was all but uninhibited. .

Sophia stepped in and said “Maybe we should arouse him and see what happens?”

That was too much for Ruth. “Come on show us the rest. Take it all off.” It was Ruth again being impatient.

“Sophia ... can I touch them too?” It was Jessi.

“Ask him.” Sophia responded.

I looked down at Jessi and shook my head. Both Ruth and Jessi got upset. “It was her wish!” I responded.

As I did this Sophia brought her fingers to her nose and smelled them. “Mmmmm.”

“That’s not fair!” It was Ruth acting like a spoiled child again. I could see she was more angry at Sophia, than she was at me. Ruth had already argued with Jessi and I could see her next picking a fight with Sophia and so I reconsidered. “Ok ... but one at a time.”

Ruth’s hand had my testicles in them in the blink of an eye. She was quite forceful and I had to tell her more than once not to be so rough with me. I could tell something else was going on with her because her hand started to move up my body. She was not merely trying to touch that part of me that

was still hidden away. She was trying to catch it with her thumb so that she could drag it into view. I stepped back from Ruth. “That’s enough. You will have to wait a bit longer before you will see all of me.” Ruth just stood there with her hand in the air wondering if she should try to manhandle me some more.

Jessi reached up for me. “My turn,” she said. What she did was unexpected. She stroked me like one would pet a cat with the back of her hand. No one had ever done anything like that to me before. I could tell you my knees went weak in a mere three seconds.

I let out a giant sigh. “Feel’s good ehhe.” Jessi knew exactly what she was doing. Then as suddenly as she started, Jessi stopped and walked away giggling. “Don’t forget I am married and have two kids ... I know all about men.”

My artist friend who had been silently watching her three friends interjected. “Let’s get back to the sculpture. I have started with his head.”

Saved by the bell. I started to put myself back into my loin cloth. I suddenly felt very cold and rubbed my arms to warm them.

“If you want to step off the pedestal and wrapped yourself in a robe you can sit and keep yourself warm as we work on your head.” I stepped off the pedestal, this time wrapping myself in the green robe and then draw a chair to in front of the armature, put a blanket down on the floor to keep my feet warm

and then sat, wrapping my legs in the blanket. For added measure my artist friend poured me another cup of tea which I drank as I sat for them. I warmed up slowly. Several times I looked over at the hors d'oeuvre tray thinking I might snag something to eat.

Here I was dressed in nothing more than a loin cloth in a room full of randy women, cold and hungry and wondering 'what the hell am I doing here?' When my artist friend asked me to come and sit for this birthday party it seemed like a good idea at the time. But now that I have been here for half the night I felt differently. I was tired. I was tired of them, I was tired of the whole art thing. And what would I really get out of this. A piece of cake and much embarrassment.

As I thought this, I looked up and saw that Sophia was studying my visage very closely. She had a concern written all over her face. Perhaps she was reading my thoughts. I looked over at the hors d'oeuvre tray and she followed my eyes. Then she turned and lifted the hors d'oeuvre tray, walked over to me and offered me what was left on it.

"Do you read minds?" I asked her as I picked up several of the left-overs and began to munch them.

Sophia had her back turned to the others. She leaned forward and whispered into my ear "I can see you are tired, cold and dejected." I nodded. "When you are ready to leave ... I will rescue you." I winked at her.

“What are you two up to?” It was Ruth at it once again. I was getting rather tired of Ruth’s mannerisms. It was as if I had known her forever, and I wondered how the rest of the evening would drag out. We all now knew why she had no boy friend. She acted like a shrew and that would push any man away, even a kind-hearted one. Not even good sex, which I doubt she could ever deliver, could keep a man close to her, not even a casual friend with benefits ...

Sophia put her hand on her shoulder. “Hold on just a little longer ... it will be worth your while.” I looked up at her as she said this and understood. She had chosen her special wish.

Sophia walked back with the empty tray and I munched on the remnants. One had foie gras on it. Another had what I think was anchovy paste. The third one had mayonnaise with a thin slice of cucumber on it and the last of the four was the last remaining cracker with caviar on it. I fought the urge to have another piece of birthday cake. In fact I hadn’t even finished the first piece. The sugar would probably set me to sleep ... I had inherited all the bad genes in my family including a disposition to type two diabetes, something I was working very hard to avoid.

The minute hand on the clock marched towards ten o’clock and another wish. The wish was picked from the bucket and lo and behold it was one of mine. “Each woman is to recount a lusty limerick ...”

I smirked as she read my wish. “Who wants to go first?”



“I will,” said Jessi.

There once was a young girl named Anna  
a randy lass who liked to reveal  
with her curtains not that well drawn  
for all to see, standing bare as a fawn  
the neat trick she did with a banana ...”

Jessi emphasized the word banana. She was so pleased with herself and thought her limerick all so clever.

“Not bad. I have never heard that one. Will you write it down for me ... I collect bawdy limericks.”

“Maybe later ...” Jessi was probably in not state of being to be left with a sharp object like of pencil.

“Who’s next?” I looked at the other three women.

Ruth started without being asked. “While we are on the subject of bananas, here is a limerick I learned in boarding school.”

“There was a fruit vendor from Havana ...” Ruth started.

I smiled for she was reciting a very common and well known limerick.

Who screwed a girl on top of a player piano  
Then at the height of her fever  
Her backside hit the start lever  
Lo and behold, there went his banana.

Ruth started to chuckle. She ignored the others and was looking at me for approval.

“Not bad ... not bad at all.” I paused for a few seconds then said, “can we stop talking about bananas for the moment?” I turned to look at the two women who were next. My artist friend ushered Sophia to go next.

“This is one my grandfather use to recite to me in Russian when I was young girl.”

“Your grandfather?” I queried. She nodded.

There was a young girl from Cape Snog  
Who thought babies were gifts from God  
But ‘twas not the Almighty  
who one night drew up her nightie  
It was Gabriel, the archangel, from next door.

We all laughed. “That’s different ... and your grandfather told you this?”

Sophia nodded. “This was my grandfather way of telling me how not to get into trouble. The first time he told me I was maybe five years old. He was giving me a bath at the time.”

“A bath? And where was your grandmother?” I asked her.

“My grandmother died of a heart attack when I was four. I use to take the train from Moscow and spend part of my summers in the Urals with my grandfather. It was a two day train ride. My grandfather and I were very close.”

“I can see that. If you let him bathe you ...

“He was my mother’s father. He raised two daughters, my mother and my aunt. I even sometimes scrubbed his back when he was taking a bath. He had a giant wooden tub that he would set outside in the country air ... you should try a bath in the wild sometime. It’s wonderful.” She smiled broadly as she said this.

I could imagine the loveliness of her happiness to escape the big city and spend the summer time with her grandfather in the wilds of the country side. “Did you take the train all by yourself?”

Sophia nodded. “I enjoyed spending my summers with him in the Urals. My grandfather helped me grow up. He could always explain the things about life

that I had a hard time understanding. My parents were always too busy and were no help to me. ”

“That must have been wonderful, summers in the mountains with your grandfather.” When I was a boy my parents sometimes sent me to the country for a week or two to an uncle’s farm. I grew up rather quickly as a result. My grandfather once told me he did the same for my father when he was my age.

“Sometimes I didn’t even dress and I ran through the fields naked. He didn’t mind until my breasts came and I started to have my period. Then he said it was time to stop acting like a child. I miss the baths.”

“Not like Heidi in the alps.” Jessi said.

“Heidi?” Sophia answered. “Never heard of her ...”

“You’ve never heard of Heidi?” Ruth exclaimed.

Sophia shook her head.

“Do you still visit your grandfather, now that you are all grown up?” I asked.

“No. I have not seen him since I came to Canada. I don’t travel much to Russia.” She stopped for a split second then continued but in a more somber tone. “Unfortunately, my grandfather died last winter. He went out of his house to get fire wood and got lost in a blizzard. He could not find his way

back in the storm. He froze to death. They didn't find him until the thaw in the spring."

"How awful." I was surprised by the naturalness of her tone.

"That's the way things are in Siberia. I wondered if he had decided it was time to die. My mother wrote me that my grandfather knew he had lung cancer and that he wouldn't last to the summer." She stopped and the room went perfectly silent. We all looked at Sophia and felt sadness for her. She looked down at the ground. I could see she was someone who showed her emotions readily.

"We still have one more limerick do we?" It was Jessi who broke the silence. We turned to face my artist friend.

"Here's one for you, with no bananas ..."

With a man a young mother begat  
Cute triplets named Pat, Nat and Tat  
'twas fun in the breeding,  
Tough in the birth and feeding.  
But I haven't a spare tit for Tat!

We all giggled. Then Ruth turned to me and said "and you? Do you have a limerick for us?"

I pushed back. “It was my wish to hear you four recite some bawdy limericks.”

“Come on ...” Ruth was most insistent.

Jessi joined in. “You must know a few.”

“I do.” I smiled. “Ok ... here goes.”

“There was a young Irish lad named Aenus  
The Irish lasses knew he had a big p...s  
So they all stood in line  
Each to enjoy their huge find  
But like a pencil they soon whittled him down.”

“How silly.” It was Ruth. “How utterly silly.” The other women enjoyed the humor.

“That’s what a limerick is supposed to be,” I pushed back. “Silly ... utterly silly.”

“You’re not Irish are you?” Ruth quipped back. “And you don’t have a huge ...”

“Ruth!” It was my artist friend. “Behave yourself.”

“But he doesn’t ...I’ve seen it.”

“No you haven’t,” I pushed back. “And if you continue like acting like a little girl you won’t! How old are you? Three or thirty?” A sour expression broke across her face.

Ruth started to cry and ran to the bathroom. My artist friend followed her. The rest of us just stood around.

“She’s always been like that for as long as I have known her,” said Sophia.

“Her boyfriends never last past two or three months,” said Jessi.

“I can see why. Why is she so negative?” I inquired.

“Her mother is like that. Her father left when she was three.” It was Jessi again. “I don’t think she has had a father figure in her life and so she doesn’t even begin to understand men.”

“We try to help her understand, but she is stubborn and doesn’t listen,” Sophia remarked. “We are tired of introducing her to men ...”

“Or trying to get her laid ...” Jessi said this solemnly. “If we could find a man to get her pregnant then maybe she could be content with being a single mom.”

“With her attitude, where is she going to find a man to ... father her baby?” Sophia wondered aloud.

“Do you think she could manage that?” I wondered aloud. “Being a single mother and all?”

“Probably not.” said Jessi. “She figures all she needs is to open her legs wide and let someone furrow her groove, and plant their seed.” Jessi was looking at me intently.

“And she figures that it will be me.” I shook my head.

“That’s why she wants to take you home with her.” Sophia admitted. “She figures it is part of her birthday gift.”

“Not interested!” I shook my head. “Not interested in the least. Get some other man ... not me.”

“You need to tell her that.” Jessi blurted out, midway through a sip of her wine.

“Why ... why should I have to tell her that? It’s a ridiculous belief to begin with to think that I would want to father a child with her. My artist friend asked me to come this evening to sit as an artist model, not to end up as someone’s male concubine.”

“Oh boy.” Jessi finished her wine. “Your clothes are in the bathroom aren’t they?”



I nodded.

“So we can’t make a quick get-away.” Sophia said.

“We?” Jessi looked over at Sophia.

“I offered to drive him home,” Sophia responded.

“Oh Ruth will like that!” Jessi spat the words out.

“You have two children don’t you Jessi?” She nodded. “So you know what being a mother is all about.”

“Boy do I ever!” She began to pour herself another glass of wine.

“Could you manage without your husband?” I asked.

She shook her head. “He’s a slob and all, but he does bring home the bacon. I couldn’t work full time and also look after my little ones.”

“How old are your children?” I asked.

“My daughter is four and a half, and my son is about to turn two.” She smiled proudly.

“How do you manage?”

“I stay home during the week and look after my two kids. I work part time on the weekends. My hubby looks after the children on the weekends.”

“And Ruth does she work full time?” I asked.

“Six days a week.” Sophia answered, “but she lives in an apartment that she owns and has tons of money in the bank. She inherited the apartment from a spinster aunt.”

“She could be a stay at home mother ... but the issue is not finances, it’s her emotional state. You’re right about her acting like a child. Her mother never gave her the freedom to grow up. It has only been this last year that she has finally lived on her own.”

I nodded my head in understanding. “So now she wants to get on with her life.”

Both Jessi and Sophia nodded in agreement.

My artist friend reappeared. “She wants to see you,” she said looking over at me.

“Oh boy,” I said out loud. “I am not going in the bathroom alone with her.”

“You did with Sophia,” Jessi said.

“We can trust Sophia to act like an adult,” I retorted. “You, yourselves tell me that Ruth acts like a child.” I looked over at my artist friend, pleading with my eyes. She nodded. We both walked to the bathroom and just before I walked through the bathroom door I pulled my robe tightly closed.

Ruth looked up at the two of us. “I want to be alone with him.” I shook my head and turned to my friend and said “please stay.”

Ruth turned to the mirror and went all flush with anger. “Don’t you trust me to be alone with me?”

She looked at me in the mirror. I shook my head.

“Why not?” Her voice was angry.

“I think you want to jump me. I know you want a baby ...”

She turned her head and scowled at me. “Who told you this?”

“Your friends did,” I said emphatically.

“My friends!” Ruth looked at my artist friend and I said “yes your friends Jessi and Sophia. They are worried about you..”

“What if I want a baby, why should that matter to them?” She took a step towards me.

I sighed. “You know if a man takes a woman against her will it is called rape. What if a woman takes a man against his will ... what is that called?”

“It’s different!” Ruth retorted.

“Is it?” I pushed back. “I came tonight here tonight because my friend asked me to sit as an artist’s model. If I knew I was expected to impregnate the birthday girl I would have stayed home.”

Ruth started to cry. “You don’t like me!”

Boy was this childish I thought. “No one said that ...” I tried to assuage her. But I was not convincing. She continued to cry.

My artist friend tried to console her. “Perhaps I should leave.” I started to collect my clothes.

Ruth realized that I meant not merely to step out of the room but to leave the atelier. “Please,” she said. “Don’t go.”

My artist friend piped up, “we haven’t finished the sculpture yet. Stay for another hour.” I looked at her. “Please.” I scowled, nodded and set my clothes back down.

Ruth was drying her tears.

“Let talk with Ruth alone for a few minutes.” My artist friend looked over at Ruth and gave her a motherly frown then left the two of us alone in the bathroom.

I thought a little ‘*brotherly advice*’ to Ruth would be in order. “You’re still quite young to be a mother. What’s the rush?”

“I am thirty!” Ruth blurted out. “I am getting old.”

“Are you physically ready to have a baby? Have you seen your doctor and has he told you you’re ready to carry another life in you for nine months. After all, this isn’t just about you, it’s about another life too.”

“What would you know about this.” Ruth was cutting in her words.

“Enough ... it’s mostly about common sense. Even us dumb boys can understand what’s going on.” Her head shot sideways when I said dumb. I emphasized the word dumb to mock her. In the short time I have known her I knew she did not like to be mocked. Perhaps it was a mannerism her mother used with her.

“I have sibling who have children. I am an uncle to these children.”

Ruth turned to me and asked me “Do you have a girlfriend? How come you don’t have kids of your own?”

I looked at her for a few seconds trying to sort out even if I was going to answer her questions, let alone how I would answer them if I decided to. I decided two white lies are in order. “Yes I have a girl friend (in fact I was between commitments) and I am probably infertile (a rather big white lie).”

She ignored the first answer and focused on the second. “Infertile?”

“I have chronic neck and back problems. The chronic pain probably prevents my testicles from doing their jobs.” She did not look all that convinced so I continued. “Besides my doctor tells me that all the ibuprofen I take causes something known as hypogonadism ... a condition where sperm isn’t being produced. And if by chance they are being produced would they be healthy sperm?”

“Oh,” her face softened. She understood what I meant by ‘would they be healthy?’

“If my chronic pain ever goes away and if I ever get off the pain killers then things will probably go back to normal.”

“I see.” For the first time this evening she showed sympathy on her visage.

“If you took me home tonight and expected me to father a child ... odds are I would be shooting blanks.” Again, another white lie, but it was serving its purpose. In fact, all this attention was causing my testicles to tingle with arousal.

“Let’s go finish the sculpture,” I leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek. I doffed my robe and draped it over my arm. “When you are ready come and tug on the ribbons.” I looked down at the ribbons when I said this, and so did she.

I walked over to the door and looked back at her. She seemed a totally different person. She seemed not so nervous and not so insistent. “I will be there in a minutes. Thank you.”

I walked back to the others and said “things are fine. She’ll be back in a moment.”

“You’ll be staying then,” Jessi asked inquisitively.

I nodded. “And we’ll finish the sculpture together.”

I got up onto the pedestal and took up my pose. The women milled about quietly wondering what would happen when Ruth returned. They would not have long to wait.

When Ruth reappeared she looked calm and composed. She stopped in front of me and looked up. “Doesn’t he look beautiful?” she asked. It was a rhetorical question and so no one responded. Without looking at anyone else she slowly brought her hands up to my hips. I could see her hands were shaking. I could feel her warmth of her hands against my hips. She looked up into my eyes and I nodded and well ... with a big smile on her face she tugged at the ribbons and out I popped, David in all his glory.

The other women started to clap and Ruth turned around to them proudly held up the loin cloth.

“Happy Birthday,” they all said to her. I just stood there looking out into the distance, with the towel over my shoulder and a smile on my face.

Ruth turned back and admired me affectionately. Her head was blocking the view of the others and so she knew she had me all to herself. As she marvel at my immodesty I could feel the throb of my heart amplified by the best of me. Then without saying a sound she places a warm hand on my stomach just above my groin and whispered “thank you ... thank you for understanding.”

With those words Ruth turned around and joined her friends and together they crafted the most challenging parts of their sculpture of me and perhaps, in their eyes, the most memorable. I stood there naked and unabashed and wondered what women saw in the most intimate character of men.



I understood how I viewed the intimacy of women, it was three fold, first the curves, and softness of them (something you don't see in the angular roughness of men), second their breasts which I marvel, and envy to be perfectly honest, and finally there is their *source de vie*, those soft and inviting folds that snatches a man inside them and elicits the most remarkable ecstasy from woman and man alike.

Out of the blue Sophia asked me, "what are you thinking?"

"Why do you ask?" I was curious.

"It's just that you are naked here in front of us and you have a calm expression on your face." Sophia was honest in her asking.

"I was wondering what the four of you possibly see in me standing as I am on this pedestal? The women laughed together. Their response was as if I had asked a joke.

"You must be joking," said Jessi. "My panties are wet through and through, and you're making my day." I was not surprised to hear Jessi be so candid for I knew she was four sheets to the wind and lacked any inhibitions. "Imagine how you'd feel if you were doing a sculpture and I was the one up there on the pedestal, bare naked."

I looked down at the pedestal and said "you know there is room for two up here."

“Do you want company?” I nodded, curious to see what would happen next. My artist friend, Ruth and Sophia all tried to dissuade her both Jessi was determined. She took off the smock and handed it to my artist friend, unbuttoned the front of her dress, stepped out of it and tossed it at Ruth. All Jessi had on now were her nylons, panties and shoes. She kicked off her shoes and started for the pedestal. When she got to the foot of the pedestal she skinnied out of her nylons so that only her panties remained.

“Sophia,” I said, “can you help her up.” Sophia stepped forward and grabbed Jessi by her hips and helped her up on the pedestal. There was barely enough room for the two of us, but there the two of us stood. I looked her up and down and saw a middle aged woman with a few extra pounds on her but still desirable in all measures.

Jessis started to wobble a bit and so she wrapped her arms around me. “If we fall down, we go down together ... Oh ...” she giggled “you know what I mean.”

“I think I do.” I held onto her with my left arm around her hip. Her hip was pressed right up against mine. “Perhaps you should keep your panties on, for modesty’s sake.”

“Hell no ...” she started to work them off her hips with her left hand.

“Won’t your hubby get angry?” I asked diplomatically.

“He’ll never know will he?” She looked up into my eyes as she said this. Then she turned and looked at her friends, “ ... because no one will tell him.” Then she kicked her panties across the room with her left foot. We nearly fell off the pedestal as she did this.

“Careful now ...” I had to steady the both of us.

“There. That’s better.” She smiled warmly as she said this. “I like you. You are the most beautiful man I have ever seen.”

I decided to humor her and parroted back, “I like you too. You are one the most beautiful women I have ever seen.”

“You don’t think I am too fat.”

I shook my head.

“You don’t think my breasts sag too much?”

I looked down at her beautiful breasts and shook my head a second time.

She leaned forward and kissed me on the cheek. “Where were you ten years ago when I was looking?”

“Still in high school ...”

“Boy ... you’re young,” she said loud enough for everyone to hear. Then she whispered into my ear, ‘do you have a girl friend?’”

I understood what she was asking me and so I leaned forward and whispered into her ear “not at the present time, what do you have in mind?”

She whispered “don’t forget to leave me your telephone number ...”

“What are you too misfits up to?” It was Ruth once again the birthday girl.

Jessi glared at Ruth and said “he’s a naught boy. He’s talking dirty to me.”

I pushed back and said “she started it.” Together both Jessi and I laughed to our own private joke. Then Jessi stepped in front of me on the pedestal so that the best of me was touching the best of her. She whispered into my ear “doing something next Saturday lunchtime?”

I whispered into her ear “I take it you have plans for us.” She nodded.

“I wonder if one of us should get off the pedestal before we both topple off.”

Jessi started to step back down the pedestal holding closely to me as she did this. I had to work hard to keep both of us from tumbling off. As her lips passed my intimate place she placed a kiss on the best of me so carefully that only she and I knew she had done this. Oh my god, I thought. I now

understood why she had drunk so much. She wanted a reason to get crazy and connect with me. I had gotten an angle on why Sophia craved intimacy, and also why Ruth did. Now I wondered why Jessi craved intimacy.

I imagine it was not unheard of for a wife to lose interest in her husband after the birth of their children. Perhaps it had something to do with the pain and personal suffering a mother goes through when she gives birth to a child. Pushing a big baby out of a small orifice sounds like anguish. Perhaps it is because of the long hours of changing diapers and breast feeding and the worry when the little one is not well. Having babies must drive a wedge between woman and man, mother and father, wife and husband. It must also profoundly change the sexuality of the woman.

I could see Jessi wanting to be fancy free again. I could also see her wanting to be reminded how incredibly beautiful she is. Her home was perhaps no longer the place for such tributes. Sad I thought.

“There you are being philosophical again.” It was Sophia who said this. I looked down and saw the three women helping Jessi back into her clothes. “What were you thinking?”

Jessi looked up at me as Sophia asked.

I smiled. I could not tell them the truth could I. So I decided to tell them my theory of Genesis. “Do you know why God created woman after man?”

“No ... I don’t,” Sophia said.

“She learned from her mistakes ... and won an award for the creation of woman.”

“You are a real philosopher,” sniggered Jessi.

“So you are a mistake?” Ruth exclaimed.

“Born on a wednesday morning. You tell me.”

“Everything looks perfect where I am standing,” responded Jessi. “What a view. Can I take you home and set you up in my living room, permanently?”

“Won’t your kids be offended?” I teased her.

“They’re too young to know any better. Besides my daughter and son share their baths together. It’s not as if they haven’t seen it all.”

“You’re husband would probably get out the garden snips.” I continued with the tease.

“You know ... I think he would!” Jessi made a pair of snips with her fingers and said “snip ... snip ... snip ...”

I covered myself with my hands.

“Awww ... it’s a bit late to get bashful isn’t it,” Ruth said.

I left my hands where they were. “Let’s finish off the sculpture. I am getting cold and all this drama is tiring me out.” The four women walked back to the sculpture and only when they had picked up their tools and began to work did I uncover myself.

“I don’t remember David being so prominent,” Ruth joked.

I decided to tell her why. “The thought of snip ... snip ... snip is a subconscious arousal for men. Just the thought is enough to elicit a want to have one last moment of ecstasy ... before being robbed of it forever.”

“Aha ....” Jessi said. “That explains it.”

“Explains what?” After asking I suddenly regretted I had.

“My husband now likes to be tied down and well ...”

“Well what ..” Ruth asked her.

“Be cuckolded ...” Jessi said.

“Cuckolded?” Ruth asked. Even I did not know what that meant.

“He wants me to tie his balls up and that arouses him so much it’s like a champagne bottle popping its cork ... but ...” I smiled, for I now understood what it meant.

“but what?” Ruth asked.

“He doesn’t mind that its killing his sperm ...” Jessi said dejectedly. “He says two kids are enough.”

I had to ask. “And what do you think ...”

“Huh?”

“About two are enough ...” I looked at her.

“I like being a mother ...” It was an enigmatic response. “I don’t really want to have sex anymore with my husband. He’s gotten a bit too weird for me in bed.”

“Maybe we should leave things at that,” Sophia interjected. I smiled. Yes, I think we should, I thought looking at Jessi, for now at least.

For a few minutes there was quiet in the room. They were busy trying to sculpt that part of me that was soft and intricate. I tried to think of something else and not on what they were doing.



In perhaps another five more minutes my artist friend set down her sculpting tool and said “voila, c’est fini!”

I did not ask for permission but merely stepped off the pedestal and put on my robe. Then I walked over to the sculpture and smiled. It was finished and it looked very much like me.

“It’s wonderful,” I said. “Happy Birthday Ruth.” I leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek and the other women followed suit.

“I think I will go get dressed now.”

“Don’t duck out the back door,” said Jessi.

“I won’t.” I said back.

Ruth stepped forward and gave me a big hug pressing her breasts against me. “Thank you for being our model.” I smiled when I heard her say ‘our.’

When she let me go I said “while I am next door you might want to put your bras back on ... or not.”

The women looked at each other and shook their heads, giggling together.

My artist friend said, “despite a few little dramas, this evening turned out good at the end.”

“It did, didn’t it. If you want me to sit for another birthday party just ask.” I said warmly.

“You would do that?’ Jessi retorted.

“For you, my artistic wench ... I would do anything.” When I called her a wench her face went bright red.

“Now look what you have done. I am blushing like a young school girl.”

“Do I have that effect on you?” She nodded her response. “I am glad.”

I turned and walked to the bathroom, closed the door behind me and started to dress. I took my time. I was not in a hurry, to be perfectly frank. I wanted my artist friend to wrap the sculpture up and help walk it to Ruth’s car. I also wanted Jessi to catch a ride with Ruth so that it freed Sophia entirely for the rest of the evening. I still owed Sophia her unique wish and I didn’t want anyone else to find that out.

In my heart I knew Ruth would be content to go home with her sculpture instead of with me. I had made it clear to her she cannot have me – that I am not a male concubine. Ruth could probably handle this night alone now that her birthday party has been such a success.

There was a knock at the door. “Are you coming out?” It was my artist friend. I opened the door wide and nodded. “They want to thank you for being our model.”

I followed her back into the atelier. The four women were waiting for me. They let Ruth go first. She stepped forward and gave me a big hug. “Thank you.” Since she had not put her bra back on when she pressed against me I could feel the fullness of her bosom. She would have no trouble feeding her babies I thought ... now if only she could find a man and settle down. “Will I see you again?”

“It’s a small world ... “ I did not want to say more lest she ask me for my telephone number. “Our friend here,” I pointed to my artist friend, “knows how to get in touch with me.”

I said this loud enough for the four of them to hear, including Jessi who I know wanted my number. But I did not even want to give it to her, for some reason. I had seen her drunk, I figured I needed to see her sober to see if I could trust her to be my friend. Ruth stepped back to let Jessi give me a hug. Jessi sort of stumbled forward and fell into my arms. “The second time you have saved me from toppling over.” I lifted her up and she gave me a big hug too. I had seen her breasts and were surprised that in the viewing they seemed larger than in the hugging. Mental note to myself – size is relative to the perceiving.

In her own way Jessi was trying to entice me to be her friend. She whispered “my number is 604 – 929-4231 ... what’s yours?”

I looked at her directly. “When is your birthday?” I whispered to her.

She looked at me and understood immediately. “In a month and a bit ...”

“Well then let’s meet here again in a month and a bit shall we?”

Jessi nodded. “Ruth’s driving her home,” my artist friend said almost as if she was reading my mind.

“That’s good. Let me help you clean up?” I said this as a way of pushing Ruth and Jessi on their way and it worked. In less than a minute they were out the door and on their way.

“That was clever,” Sophia said.

“I have my moments.” I quirked back. I started to pick up some of the refuse and throw it into the garbage can.

“Yes he does ...” said my artist friend. “You made Ruth very happy today and will make Jessi an excellent birthday surprise ...”

“Some surprise,” Sophia retorted.

“Sophia, trust me, Jessi will be counting down the days to her ‘surprise’ birthday party,” my artist friend said in annoyance. “Don’t you see how unhappy she is?”

Sophia nodded. You’re right.”

“I can finish cleaning up.” My artist friend said. “Sophia says she will drive you home.”

I nodded and gave my artist friend a good night hug. “This was lots of fun.”

“I can interpret that in many ways. I think there was at least times this evening when I figured – that’s it, he’s leaving.”

“Yes ... at least three times. But I hung in.”

More like hung out,” Sophia giggled as she said this. I smiled and nodded to her.

Then I sighed. I was suddenly tired ... very tired. I was also hungry enough to eat a horse. “I should have eaten something before I came.”

“We can stop somewhere to pick you up something to eat when I drive you home.” Sophia was being generous.

“I have some left overs from dinner yesterday that I can heat up and munch on.” I was too tired to even want to stop to eat.

“Better go then.” My artist friend ushered us to the door. “It’s getting late.” She then said something in Russian to Sophia.

I was curious and raised my eyebrows. “I told her to take you right home ... and to not be foolish.”

“Foolish?”

“Foolish,” she harped back.

I looked at Sophia and shrugged my shoulders then let her go first through the door.

“Call me tomorrow,” my artist friend said as we stepped into the dark night.

The atelier was on a quiet side street a block over from a busy intersection. There was a street light at opposite corners of the side streets. I walked silently beside Sophia as we walked to her car. It was parked across the street one block over.

I got curious. “Why did you park so far from the atelier?”

“I didn’t want my ex to know that I was there.”

“He’s being a problem is he?” I was silly asking, for it was evident in her need to be so discrete.

“Even if we have broken up, he would still go through the roof seeing me in a room with a naked man.” Sophia’s voice was deadpan. “I figured since he did not see my car he figured I wasn’t in the atelier. I have been stopping by for tea and conversation.”

We got to her car. It was not what I expected. It was a bright red late model VW beetle from the 1980’s. She unlocked the doors and we got in. I had to fold myself nearly in half to get through the door but found there was enough comfortable room for me once I was seated.

She started the car and it coughed without starting. He let it sit for five seconds and tried again. It almost caught. She let it sit for a few seconds more and on the third turn of the key the little beetle sprung into life. It rattled like an old washing machine. She slip the car into reverse and back her up, then put her into first gear and guided us skillfully out form the curb and into the street. Then she accelerated around a left hand turn screeching the tires as she did this.

“Wow can you drive.” I was impressed.

“My grandfather taught me how to drive. He also taught me how to fix cars too. He had been a mechanic in the Red Army Air force during the Great

Patriotic War.” You can sense the pride in her voice. “He worked for the Trans-Siberian Railway for over forty years after the war.”

“Must have been a very interesting person your grandfather.” I said this trying not to sound scared for she had accelerated to over 100 kilometers per hour down the back street. “What’s the rush?”

“You must be very tired.” Sophia looked over at me as she said this.

“Keep your eyes on the road Sophia!” I tried to hide the panic in my voice but I knew I hadn’t. “I don’t have to get up early tomorrow and so I can stay up late!”

She eased back on the accelerator. “That’s better.” She took a close right turn and in half a block we were at a busy cross street. Without coming to a full stop she glanced both ways and threaded us across the street and going west bound in a wide sweeping left turn. I closed my eyes as she did this. I just could not watch.

The fact that I am sharing this story with you means that I survived the drive home with Sophia, into the downtown, across the Lions Gate Bridge and onto the North Shore. I did not engage her in conversation while she drove me thinking that it would be safer if she concentrated entirely on her driving.

Instead I turned on the radio and put some relaxing music on. “That’s terrible she said,” taking her eyes off the road and a hand off the steering wheel as she



struggled to find good music. While she did this we drove a Chinese lead line across two lanes of westbound traffic. Thank god at this time of night there was not much traffic going either way on Taylor Way. She found some classical music and turned her attention back onto her driving. Then she gunned it and we raced up Taylor Way, in the process probably waking sleepers for miles around.

“This is some car you have here.”

She turned and smiled. “You like her do you?”

“Keep your eyes on the road ... we’ll be turning left at the lights.” I waited a second before saying. “The car has character just like its owner.”

“She keeps on breaking down and I keep on fixing her. My car is sort of like a reflection on my life.”

“That it has lots of spirit?” I thought something uplifting would be best said.

She turned and I could see tears welling in her eyes. “I knew there was something special about you.”

“What’s that?”

“You have a kind heart.” She said this choking back emotion. We were merging on the high way and so she had to turn away and look over her left shoulder. “I like you,” she said without looking at me.

“I like you too,” I said in return.

We were now on the Trans Canada highway going West. “Can I ask you something?”

“Sure ... anything.”

“What is your special wish?”

She turned and looked at me. “There is something about you that reminds me of my grandfather ...”

“Really!”

“Yes ... you have a kind heart just like he did. And you respect and admire the beauty of things.”

“So I am told ... so what is your wish?” I was now very curious.

She didn’t look at me when she said her wish. Maybe she was worried I would say no.

“It’s been a long time since I let someone scrub my back ... and since someone let me scrub theirs.”

I did not say a word but just leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. Sophia looked over at me and I nodded. I could see in the dull traffic light that tears of happiness began to stream down her face.

Spaciba ... Spaciba

She fell asleep around one in the morning in my arms smelling of bath salts and roses and dreaming of Siberian meadows. When I awoke next morning, it was to the sound of her beetle firing up.

There was a little note on the night table with a heart and her telephone number. I called her later that afternoon and we have been very close friends ever since.



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